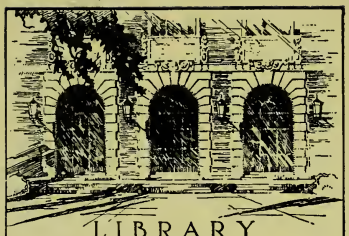

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VESTIGIA

VESTIGIA

BY

GEORGE FLEMING

AUTHOR OF
'A NILE NOVEL,' 'MIRAGE,' 'THE HEAD OF MEDUSA,' ETC.

VOL. I.

'Vestigia nulla retrorsum'

London
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DEDICATED TO

F. H.

(OF MARIGOLA),

—to know whom is indeed a 'liberal education' in all that is gracious and good—in loving memory of that bright March morning, years ago, when we met in a certain street in Leghorn.

LONDON, 1884.

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VESTIGIA.

CHAPTER I.

MOTHER AND SON.

It was nearly five o'clock of a raw and windy afternoon in the month of March, 187–, when a young man, Bernardino de Rossi by name, came hastily out of an inner room of the Telegraph Office building at Leghorn, letting the heavy swinging door close sharply behind him with a disagreeable sound.

The room which he entered was one reserved for the use of the Government clerks. Its floor was bare; its high walls, painted the same dull uniform yellow as the

rest of the building, were lighted from above by a row of small square windows, crossed with rusty bars of iron—an arrangement which involuntarily suggested a prison ward; and there was little to contradict this fancy in the appearance of the line of high desks ranged along three sides of the room, or in the expression of the figures bending over them. The names and dates and rude caricatures scrawled over every available space of plaster and woodwork seemed indeed an indication that such absorbed industry was not the invariable rule; but on that especial afternoon a dead silence prevailed. To one accustomed to the ways of the place it was a significant silence, broken only by the monotonous ticking of the telegraph wires heard through the half-open door of the adjoin-

ing room, and the rapid scratching of many pens.

At De Rossi's entrance one of the younger clerks, a mere lad, with pale watery eyes and a Jewish profile, looked up from his writing.

'Well, Dino?' he murmured anxiously.

De Rossi glanced at him and hesitated.

'It is all right. Only—I'm off.'

'Not—not dismissed, Dino?'

'Dismissed. Turned out. Turned off. Sent away without a character, like a bad cook. Put it any way you prefer it, it all comes to the same thing. But it really does not matter in the least. It was sure to come to that in the end. There is nothing for—for any one to be sorry about. So don't trouble—don't let any one trouble himself on my account,' the young man

added rapidly, his face lighting up with a sudden very pleasant smile.

'But—Dino——'

'Who is making that noise? I ask you, who is making that noise there? By Heaven! you are enough to drive a man mad amongst you. Chatter! chatter! chatter! Nothing but gossip and chatter, like a parcel of idle women after mass. Government employees you call yourselves; my word, it is a useful kind of employment that,' interposed the large pale-faced man, who occupied a desk by himself, in the warmest corner, beside the stove, at the far end of the room. 'You were not speaking? Don't tell *me*, sir. I say you are always speaking—and to no purpose. Chatter, chatter, chatter! and slamming doors——'

'Come, come, Sor Checco. Come now;

the lads mean no harm by it. I'll answer for them. They mean no harm,' observed another large, middle-aged individual, who was elaborately filling up an empty telegraph form, standing beside one of the desks provided for the use of the public. He spoke in a good-natured, husky voice. Despite the cold, the yellow fur collar of his enormous cloak was thrown wide open upon his shoulders, and from time to time he paused heavily in his writing, to rub his forehead with the blue and red checked handkerchief which he carried, rolled up in a ball, in his left hand. 'And as for their talking—as for their talking,' he went on soothingly, 'why, what can you expect? Every donkey prefers his own bray. And our young friend's little accident with the door there——'

'Accident! accident! Who believes in accidents? Any fool can call a thing an accident,' retorted Sor Checco, with increasing irritation, standing up and giving an impatient push to his chair. The chair immediately slipped back against the nearest end of the fender, bringing the fire-irons to the ground with a loud rattle and crash.

There was a general laugh at the head clerk's expense, under cover of which Dino walked quietly over to his old place under the window, unlocked a drawer with a key which he took from his pocket, and began putting together some loose papers and a manuscript book.

One by one the clerks suspended their work, turning their heads to watch him, but no one ventured to speak again until

worthy Sor Giovanni—having written out his despatch and read it over carefully, checking off each word on the thick square fingers of his right hand—turned about with a satisfied air, and catching sight of young De Rossi's occupation, 'Why, lad, lad,' he said, reprovingly, 'you're never packing up your things to go on account of six cross words and a sour look? Come, come, my boy, leave that sort of thing to the women folk—God bless them! But a man can't afford to catch fire every time he strikes a match. Come now. Here is something different for you to do. Why, lad, if bad temper were a fever there wouldn't be hospitals enough to hold us all. Come now. Send off this despatch for me like a good fellow. And no nonsense about mistaking the address. Vis-

conti, Guiseppe, No. 20, Via Tordinona, Rome. There it is all written out for you as plain as the blessed cross on the roof of the Duomo. And here is my franc waiting to pay for it. Fifteen words. You may count it over, you'll find no cheating. I'll answer for it you won't.'

He laughed a good-natured satisfied laugh, and dabbed at his forehead with his checked handkerchief. 'Come, my boy,' he said very good-humouredly, leaning confidentially across the top of the desk, and pushing over the paper and the money.

Dino looked up with a sharp gesture of impatience. 'Oh, go to some one else!' he began; and then seeing the other's beaming face so near his, and being always ready to be affected by a kind

word or a kind look, 'I would serve you if I could, Sor Giovanni,' he added quickly; 'but the fact is—I'm no longer a clerk here. My name was taken off the books this morning. I'm dismissed.'

'Dismissed! Why, lad—why, God bless my soul! what have you been doing then?' cried Sor Giovanni huskily, bringing his hand down heavily upon the table.

Dino's face flushed; he gave a little laugh. 'Ah, that is the question!' he said, turning away with some slight embarrassment and beginning to fasten up his papers: they were letters chiefly.

'It *is* the question; there I quite agree with you. It is very much the question,' added the head clerk, Sor Checco, coming forward and resting both hands upon the back of the desk. He looked at the young

man with a hard glance. 'Before you leave—and, as I had the honour of telling the Director this morning, it is a question of your leaving or of mine,—before you leave you will perhaps have the goodness to explain the nature of those documents which——'

'I shall have the goodness to explain precisely nothing at all,' retorted De Rossi promptly, standing up and thrusting the package of papers into the breast pocket of his coat. With the change of attitude every vestige of hesitation seemed to leave his bearing. 'To *you*, Sor Giovanni,' he said, looking at him very gratefully, 'I have to express my regret that circumstances prevent my doing you so trifling a service——'

'But—God bless my soul! But I don't

understand. Come now, lad, what is the row all about? 'I don't understand in the least; upon my soul I don't. Why, look here. Here am I, so to speak,'—he unfolded one corner of the checked handkerchief,—'here am I writing my despatches as quiet as a sleeping babe. And there is Sor Checco, poor man! busy in his own corner and thinking of nothing. And here are you——'

Dino smiled. 'Was Sor Checco thinking of nothing? It would be a pity to interrupt him. Besides, to him I have nothing to say. He knows my opinion of him,' the young man added sharply, with a sudden light of indignation flashing in his eyes. 'To the others here,—to my old companions——'

He looked down the long room, but at

the sound of his words each head was bent lower over its work. De Rossi's face flushed and turned pale like a girl's. He bit his lip, where the smile seemed suddenly to have grown fixed and unnatural, and turned to a peg on the wall from which was hanging a long gray ulster coat. He took down this coat and put it on, buttoning it across his breast with a deliberation which could not entirely prevent his fingers from trembling. He took down his hat, and stood there for an instant facing the entire room. The light had almost faded away from the small high windows, but there was not a corner of those sordid yellow walls, not a face among those averted faces with which he had not felt familiar. Why, even the chief clerk's fault-finding had its associations with many an old

foolish light-hearted joke—he had grown accustomed to the discontent, as a man grows accustomed to the rough handle of his daily tool. 'I wish you a very good afternoon. And—and I'm very much obliged to you for your kindness,' the young fellow said abruptly, turning to Sor Giovanni and putting out his hand. And then yielding to an impulse for which he never quite forgave himself, 'I have worked here every day for the last four years, and there is not a man in this room whom I would not have called my friend,' he said bitterly enough, and put his hat upon his head and walked out of the room before them all.

As he passed before the young clerk to whom he had spoken on first entering, the boy moved uneasily in his chair, muttering

some indistinct word; but at the same moment Sor Checco's voice was heard giving a harsh command that the gas be lighted without further delay. 'And 'tis time surely for more light, when we lose so brilliant an example,' added a tall cadaverous-looking youth, who had hitherto sat silent, keeping a small but wary eye upon the stormy countenance of the patron. Dino could remember years after the pang of bitter and impotent resentment which made him start and clench his fist outside there in the long cold corridor at the echo of the sound of their laughter.

It was a cold clear night, with many stars and a piercing March wind, which set the gas lamps flickering in the deserted Via Grande; for it was a Saturday, and all the Jewish shops were closed; and

even the few Christian vendors scattered here and there along the street seemed for once to have renounced both orthodoxy and profit, and were for the most part engaged in putting up their shutters with cold and hasty hands. As he turned, with the automatic accuracy of a man going homewards, out of the main thoroughfare into one of those many narrow streets which lie between the Via Grande and the port, it was indeed a wintry blast which struck the young man full in the face making him catch his breath with a gasp and thrust his hands deeper into the pockets of his long thin coat; but what was this violence of the outer air in comparison to that other fiercer storm, that tumult of hurt pride, of wounded disregarded sensibility, the passionate in-

dignation, the hundred mad impulses and promptings which tore at each other and contradicted each other inside his breast? The recollection of his own last words came back to him, and every nerve quivered. He could have struck himself with anger and disgust at his own weakness in having spoken them. 'To have called them—*them*—my friends!' he muttered half aloud. 'If they were laughing at *that!*' he thought, and his face grew hot and cold again as he remembered their laughter.

It was not until he had actually quitted the street, and was rapidly running up the dark stair of a narrow building, that another thought seemed to strike him with a sudden power to slacken his impatient footstep and hold him, hesitating, outside a closed

door. 'And the mother? what will she say to it all?' he asked himself, and looked at the latch-key in his hand. An expression of mingled weariness and defiance, the expression of a man who expects to find but short and scanty indulgence between the four walls of his home, crossed his face for an instant. He opened the door and went in.

First came a little hall, a mere passage-way; beyond that again was a large low room, somewhat empty of furniture, with blackened rafters which divided the ceiling into squares. The walls were white-washed, scrupulously clean, and quite devoid of character, but here and there a touch of faded colour,—the blurred outline of a flying figure, some heavy tracery of fruit or flower, or line of tarnished gold,

still spoke of the original painting of the roof. Facing the door a narrow window led out upon a rickety iron balcony, high hung beneath the eaves of the old house, and from thence in the daytime the view was superb, stretching across the Old Port and the New, over the sea, to the pale vision-like peaks of Carrara.

But to-night the curtain was close drawn. A single oil lamp, with a long wick, was burning on the mantelpiece; its light fell upon the bent gray head of an elderly woman, who was knitting busily, and only occasionally moving a little to cast an anxious glance at the contents of an earthen vessel which stood before the fire.

She looked up, with an air of almost painful suspense in eyes which had once been celebrated for their beauty, and which,

even yet, shone clear and dark beneath the troubled brows; she looked up, still holding her knitting with both hands, as her son entered.

'Well, Dino?' she said breathlessly.

'Well, mother. You see I was not mistaken. I thought I should come home rather later to-night,' the young man answered, with an attempt at speaking easily. He came and stood before the fire, spreading out his chilled fingers to the warmth of the blaze. 'It is a cold night. I don't know when I can remember so cold a night,' he said absently. And then, rousing himself with an effort, 'Where is the little one? where is Palmira?' he asked, glancing around him.

'She has gone to spend the afternoon at Drea's. Italia came for her. It is

Italia's birthday, and they said you had arranged to call for the child,' returned his mother slowly. She bent her head still lower over her knitting. 'You will want your supper before you go out again. It is spoilt now, with keeping. It has been ready for you this hour past. I knew nothing about it. I knew nothing of when you intended to come back. Perhaps that is one of the things which you had already settled—with Italia.'

'Dear mother, I am so sorry. But indeed it was unavoidable,' said Dino soothingly. He added in a lower voice, 'Even this morning I did not think there was much chance for me. And the moment I heard the Director's conditions I saw it was all up. They wanted to get rid of me, —my being at the demonstration was a

mere pretext. Don't worry yourself about it, mother; pray don't. It must have come to this in the end. They wanted — they all wanted to get rid of me. And perhaps, all things considered, it is not so much to be wondered at.'

'Wonder? Do you think I have lived until now to wonder at any trouble overtaking us—at *any* misfortune?' interrupted Sora Catarina passionately. She took a few hasty impatient stitches, holding her work up close to her eyes, which burned painfully with hot tears of repressed disappointment. Then she rose abruptly, sweeping the balls of wool into some inner pocket; she took up the lamp, placing it upon a centre table. 'You are cold. You had better eat,' she said briefly.

'Thank you, mother. I am not hungry.'

'There were potatoes, too, cooked as you like them. But that was an hour ago,' she went on, taking a dish from the warm hearth and looking into it.

'Oh, it is sure to be good. It is my own fault that I am not hungry,' said Dino. He threw off his outer coat and drew his chair nearer to the table.

'Mother.'

'Well?'

She turned her head slowly towards him, and for the first time that evening their eyes met,—dark serious eyes, almost the only trace of resemblance between mother and son, the only feature they had in common. 'Well?' she repeated after an instant's pause. She was still standing; now she crossed the room to fetch another candle, which she lighted and placed be-

fore him. 'There is no reason you should eat your supper in the dark. It is little enough pleasure that comes here in the daytime, goodness knows. But you never did care about being made comfortable.'

'Mother, I think—I have been thinking of asking Drea if he does not want another hand at his work. I can manage a boat if I can do nothing else. And it will be something to go on with for the present. That is, if you have no objection,' said Dino, still looking at her rather anxiously.

'And if I had, what difference would it make? Will you not go your own way as your father did before you? What good has ever come of my objecting?' She had taken up her knitting again, and was turning it over and over between her trembling fingers. 'It is the same story—it began

in the same way. It began so with your father. I have seen it all before,' she said in a hopeless sort of voice, and with a half sob.

Dino looked up quickly at the sound, and seemed about to speak, but her face was turned away from him. He remained silent, pushing away the untouched food before him, and leaning both arms upon the table.

'Are you going to that—to that place again to-night? I will never mention its name—to that club of yours? But of course you are. It is the same story over again. I tell you, like father like son. And sometimes—sometimes I ask myself what is the use of it all? Though I should work my hands off,' she said passionately, 'though I work my hands off

trying to keep the place comfortable for you; trying to be respectable and keep up appearances, what is the good? As your dear Drea says, can one man lift both ends of a beam at the same time? And I'm tired of struggling against what I cannot help. Have your own way. I've tried hard enough, God knows, but there are no sails will keep a stone from sinking.' She got up restlessly from her place and walked over to the fire and came back again. 'Italia! 'tis my belief the girl has bewitched you all, with her baby face and those great eyes of hers. I spend my life, I make a slave of myself, for you and the child, and for what good? Why, even the child, even Palmira, it's little enough she troubles her head about me if she can get Italia to do so much as

look at her. Italia! I don't say she is not a good girl——'

'Mother!'

'I tell you—— Dino, I will not have you looking at me in that way. I will not have it. I am not saying anything against Italia, I tell you. I have not waited until now to have my own son teach me how to know a good girl when I see one, though, mind you, there's many a lass will sweep out the corners of the balcony while she's waiting to be married, and when she's got a husband—you'll not find her so much as wiping the dust off her own plate. Not that I am saying that Italia is of that sort. She is a good girl.'

'Yes,' said Dino lifting up his face. And then, as if there had indeed been some spell of comfort and of healing in

the very sound of her name, he rose with a new look of light and gladness in his young eyes.

'Mother, dear.' He stood looking down upon her bowed gray head for a moment, and stooped and kissed it. 'I will go for Palmira first. But I will come back as soon as I can,' he said simply. 'Poor mother! it is hard for you I know. What you wanted to make you happy was a very different sort of son — the kind of fellow who never troubled his head about other people's doings, and who would have found out long ago how to get on with Sor Checco— confound him! Poor little mother. But we must even make the best of what we have. And you will see it will not turn out so badly as you fear. Come, mother,

dear, look up before I go, and let me see that you are not angry;' he slipped his arm about her neck, forcing her to raise her head and look at him.

But although she yielded to the caress —'I am not like you; I cannot change as the wind blows. When I mean a thing I mean it,' she said, sadly enough. And long after he had gone she sat still, as he had left her, gazing fixedly at the closed door. That door! how much of her life had she not seen pass through it, not to return, since the time when the years seemed long before her and she had found her chief pride, her chief plaything, in her handsome boy! Now, it was as if with every month that passed he were going more and more away from her, as the likeness to his dead father deepened.

And the knowledge of this was like the painful pressure of a heavy hand upon her bruised mother's heart.

Disappointment, discouragement, and the rebellion against that discouragement, and all the weariness of a hard strenuous nature, for ever struggling, and for ever thrust back upon itself, were expressed in every line of her worn yet insistent face. She sat thus for what seemed to her a long space of time before she roused herself to take up her work. But before she did so she blew out both the candles. 'He likes plenty of light. They will do for him when he comes back. His eyes are young still, let him save 'em while he can,' she said half aloud, bending her own gray head still lower over her work as she knitted on and on in the darkened room.

She let the fire go down to its lowest ember; what was the good of wasting warmth if Dino was not there to enjoy it? But, indeed, she was scarcely aware of the increasing cold, her mind was already so full of new plans for the future—projects in which she unconsciously disposed of the future action of her son as confidently as if he were still the little child she remembered, her docile bright-eyed boy, knowing no other law but the imperious rule of her anxious and exacting love.

CHAPTER II.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

As he reached the quay, and even before he was so near it, from the steps above, looking across from the bridge, Dino could see the light shining like a welcome behind the curtained window of old Drea's house. The wind had fallen a little, but not the sea. The flight of stone stairs leading down to the landing from the level of the street was wet and slippery with the salt spray; even here, in the shelter of the Old Port, the black water was tossing and heaving in the light of the rising moon. There was a continual movement,

a backward and forward swaying, among the ships at anchor; a shifting of the level of the signal lights.

As he came nearer Dino could see that the friendly scarlet curtain had a great rent across the middle of it; he halted by the window, looking in with smiling eyes at the little group by the fireside. A young girl was sitting on a low stool beside the fire, with her back to the window; she was talking to a child who knelt beside her and was looking up intently in her face. The young man could not see that face, which was turned away from him, but only the outline of the dear round head, with its heavy dark twist of hair; he could not hear what she was saying; he could only watch the quick motion of her little brown hands. She

appeared to be telling some story, which the child was listening to with bated breath. All about them were scattered books and pieces of paper; there was a guitar—an open inkstand—upon a neighbouring chair. 'Ah, the idle child! the idle little girl!' the young man said to himself with a half tender laugh, looking at those fallen papers upon the floor. And then he rapped once, twice, upon the window.

Italia sprang to her feet at the sound. 'Dino! it is Dino!' she cried joyfully, and flew to the door to meet him, with two little outstretched hands, and welcome beaming in her eyes. She led him in, away from the wind and cold and darkness. 'Father is coming, and we have been expecting you, oh, for hours. I know it has been such a hard day for you, you

poor, poor Dino,' she said, in that sweet low voice of hers, which seemed made only to express the pity and goodness and loving-kindness of her gentle heart. She did not let go his hand: to the young man's fancy it was as if all the new light and warmth about him were radiating only from her look. As he gazed at her it seemed to him that he had never fairly seen her before: when she turned away again, blushing, he started as if he were awakening from a dream.

'We were speaking of interesting things. Italia was telling me a story. It was a fairy story—out of a book—but now you have come in and interrupted it,' observed little Palmira quietly, looking gravely up at both of them from where she still knelt upon the floor.

'But hush, you bad child. Why, Mira, surely you would not have our Dino think we are not glad to see him? And if we talk about fairies do you think our hard taskmaster will not begin to ask us about our lessons?' said Italia laughing, and still with that softest rosy flush upon her cheek. 'There! that is what we have done for you, signor Dino,' as she pointed to the scattered papers upon the floor. 'It was I who threw them down there, because—oh, because I had not done one of them. And I hate learning to write, it hurts my fingers; and then I can't hold my guitar. And this is my birthday, and Lucia is coming to supper with us—father has just gone over to fetch her—and see, I have put on the new dress she made for me; do you like it? But Lucia will scold

me. I have not mended the hole in the curtain, and I tore it a week ago,' cried the girl with another laugh.

'Tis a pretty dress. Have I never seen you in it before? but you always look the same in my eyes, and whatever I see you wear is what I like the best,' Dino answered, looking at her fondly. He put out his hand and touched the sleeve of her cotton frock. 'You will wear this the day we go to Monte Nero——'

'For the pilgrimage? ah, yes. And this year we must take poor Lucia with us. And the Sora Catarina;—it would not be like Monte Nero if you and your mother were not with us. Do you remember the first time we went there together, Dino? I was twelve years old.'

'And you carried your doll into the church for the benediction; I remember——'

'Ah, but it was a very pretty doll. It was the old Marchesa gave it to me, one day your mother had taken me with her to the palazzo. I remember it so well: I had never been in such a big room before, and when Sora Catarina left me alone I was frightened, and I cried. And then the Marchesa herself came in and spoke to me. She had a long train to her gown that rustled, and it had gold things on it, like the dress of the Madonna. And when she dropped her handkerchief I picked it up for her. It was fine, oh, so fine! and white, like a cobweb, and it smelt of flowers.'

'Why did she not give you that instead of a doll? I would not have taken the

doll. I despise dolls,' said Palmira, lifting up her little pale face again from her book.

'As if I had ever been as wise as you, you little monkey. Oh, Dino, I know I have been very idle all the week. And it seems so ungrateful to you after all your trouble. But I can't write, I really can't. I am like father, all my fingers are thumbs,' said Italia mournfully, shaking her head and looking down on her lap at her little sunburned hands. 'But you are not vexed with me? really not? I did not *mean* to disappoint you, Dino.'

'No, dear; I am sure of that. But now let us see these famous exercises. Perhaps they are not quite so bad.'

She gathered up all the books and brought them to him instantly, standing

beside him with perfect docility as he turned over the blotted pages. 'Of course you write so beautifully yourself,' she said. And at that young De Rossi gave a sudden start. 'Indeed I had forgotten. When I am with you I can think of nothing else. But, Italia, there was something — I knew there was something I wanted to tell you — and, what will Sor Andrea say? For I have left the office.'

'Oh, Dino!'

'Not that I mind *that* so particularly; but what will your father say? I came down to consult with him about it. I——'

'There he is!' said Italia, quickly turning her head at the sound of a heavy step, and adding hastily: 'Do tell him, Dino—tell him everything; you know how good he is'—she sprang to open the door.

The first person to enter, blown into the room, as it seemed, by a stronger gust of wind, was a small, thin woman of about forty or forty-five. Her face and shoulders were closely muffled in a woollen shawl, which Italia promptly removed and threw into a corner.

'Dear Lucia, how good of you to come to us on such a horrible night——'

'If you would not mind—if you will give it to me I will fold it up properly; things get so easily worn,' the new-comer murmured, looking apologetically at them all. And then she put up both her hands —the thin, white hands of a sewing woman —and patted the bands of her shining black hair; her dress, too, was black, and scrupulously neat, with many shining beads and buttons upon it.

'I am so glad to see you,' Italia repeated, looking down at the little woman with an indescribable friendliness and compassion in her own kind eyes.

'Ay, it was rough work getting here for the poor little woman. I left her for half a minute while I stopped to look at the boat, and *per Bacco!* she came in ahead of me in the race. I could not find her out there in the dark; I thought she had been blown clean away, I did,' observed Sor Drea with a loud, good-natured laugh. He fastened the door and came up slowly to the fireside,—a short, strongly-built figure, with a decided lurch in his walk. He came up and laid his hand upon Italia's shoulder. 'Well, my little girl? Ah! this now is what I like,' the old man said, glancing over with a broad, cordial smile at Dino;

'this is the sort of thing that does a man's heart good, to come in and find supper ready, and a good fire, and all the old faces. Who wants to eat alone? Alone? Why, one isn't comfortable alone even in Paradise; one needs an angel or two if it was only just for company. The blessed saints, they know better than to live separate, they do.'

'How do you know, father?' asked Italia, with a laugh.

'Perhaps I've met them. Perhaps I've had an angel or two to live with—there's no telling,' said her father, looking down at her fondly. 'Ask the youngster over there. Why, Lord bless you, my girl, when I was his age—— But there, there, a sound man is a young man, and the only old men are the dead ones. What's the

matter with the lad? What ails you, boy? Surely no one here can have been vexing you? You can't have been quarrelling with my little girl?' But at that—

'Quarrelling with Italia!' and 'Father!' they both protested in one breath.

Old Drea laughed good-humouredly. 'Well, well; 'tis a young sailor who does not keep ready for a change in the fairest wind. There's no such great harm in a friendly bit of a quarrel. And, bless you, lad! you and the girl there are too like brother and sister not to have found that out long before. There's no such great harm done, I tell you. Women, they are like caterpillars; they curl up if you do but touch them, but they go creeping on.'

Italia and De Rossi exchanged glances. 'Father,' the young girl began; she hesi-

tated for a moment. 'Father!' She went up to him and took one of his hard and knotted hands into both of her own, looking up into his face with the sweetest look of entreaty. 'Indeed you are always right, dear, and our poor Dino *is* in trouble,' she said simply. 'He has left—he has been sent away from his office, and he has come to his oldest friends. You are not going to be angry with him, father?' Her sweet eyes were full of tears.

'The fact is, there has been a row about a demonstration. I don't know if you heard about it. It was last month, when they were enlisting the new recruits. And some of the republican clubs got up a counter procession and marched down the Via Grande with flags, and cheered Garibaldi. And then there had been a skirmish

with the police—nothing very serious, but still—— It was a foolish business altogether,' the young man confessed, hanging his head.

'Foolish? By—— I call it by another name than foolish!' the other man broke out with sudden passion. 'Nonsense, Italia; let me speak. What does a woman know about such matters? I tell you it was a piece of rank mutiny aboard ship. You ought to have been clapped into irons, every man of you; and so you would have been if I'd had ought to do with you. So you would have been. What, sir; do you mean to tell me that you—you, a lad I've known, ay, and been fond of too, since you were a little chap as high as my knee, —do you mean to tell me, Dino, that *you've* been and joined a company of shouting

fools with nothing better to do than insult the Government that pays and keeps 'em?'

'If the Government paid me the Government got my work in return,' says the young man, turning very red; 'and I was not the only one. I was only carrying out my club's orders.'

'Then I say, damn your club, sir!'

'Father!'

'Gesu Maria! Gesu Maria! ah, those men!' sighed Lucia under her breath, and grasped Palmira's shoulder convulsively. The child shook herself free with a contemptuous movement. 'Let me be. What are you afraid of? Look at Italia,' she said quietly, turning her small pale face and great eyes full upon the young girl. De Rossi, too, had turned towards her.

'Perhaps I'd better go now, sir. I am

sorry I came in. I am sorry I troubled you,' he began in a formal voice. 'I ought, I suppose, to apologise——'

'Oh, damn your apologies!' said Sor Drea, starting up to his feet again, and taking a hasty turn across the room. 'Be a man, can't you? What is the use of apologising—of—of apologising, *per Bacco!* for what you are perfectly ready to do again—for what you mean to do again? Apologies!—yes—they're cheap enough in every market;—a good wind to torn sails. I believe in actions myself; in doing your duty by your masters and betters, and not hurting the people who love you,—not in fine gentlemen apologies — damn 'em,' said the old man, bringing his knotted hand down heavily upon the table, and glaring from under his shaggy eyebrows

at Dino with an unspoken world of troubled reproach in his keen old eyes.

There was a moment of silence, and then, 'Father, dear?' said Italia beseechingly, going up to him and slipping her arm about his neck.

'Ay, ay, my little girl. You're a good girl, I know it. A good girl, though I say it as shouldn't. But not even you—you can't think I am going to put up with this sort of nonsense from a youngster like that, a fellow who comes to talk to me of——'

'Who comes to ask advice of his oldest friends. And in your own house, father.'

'Oh, Lord help us!' said old Drea with a groan.

'And if you knew the whole of the story as I know it—I mean why it is that he has lost his place to-day. Stop, Dino.

I know it is a secret, but I think it is a secret which I ought to tell my father. If you knew why he was sent away,' said Italia, in her sweet low voice, looking with beaming eyes full of affection from one man to the other. 'It is quite true what Dino told you about the procession, father, but there is more than that. There was another man in Dino's office who joined in the procession too. And they could not find out who it was, and they wanted Dino to tell them his name. And he would not. And that is why he had to leave.'

'There, there. Say no more, child, say no more. I spoke too soon and forgot to listen. My words were like so many kittens that are born in such a hurry they're born blind. No offence, lad. There, shake

hands over it. Lord bless you; and so you wouldn't tell 'em that other chap's name—not to save your own place, eh? Ay, that was right, boy, that was right. But Lord, Lord, what a chap that one must be who let you do it.'

'He's a mere boy. He doesn't know any better. And it does not matter so much to me. I was not so anxious to stay—only on my mother's account,' said Dino slowly.

'Ay, she'll be fine and disappointed, she will. She takes things hard, does Sora Catarina. She always did from a girl. Have you told her yet, Dino?'

'Yes,' he said, glancing over at Italia.

'Ay, she'll be disappointed, she will,' the old man repeated slowly, wrinkling his brow, and looking at the fire, while

he fumbled absently in the pocket of his pea-jacket for his pipe. 'So you came and told my little girl here all about it, eh, Dino?'

'I told Italia.'

'Yes, and he told me not to repeat it to any one,' added Italia quickly.

'Ay, ay. I'll warrant you he did. Ah, he's young yet is the lad; he's young,' said Drea with a quiet chuckle. 'When you find a woman who keeps a secret for you, my Dino, you may rest pretty certain she's got some of her own to look after. And even then you need not think yours will last her. Ah, they're a queer rigged craft are women, and a secret is the ballast they think first about throwing overboard if there's ever such a capful o' wind to make the sea a bit roughish. Your mother's

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the only she-thing in petticoats I've ever seen who can hold her tongue still between her teeth—and even she can only do it by not speaking. They're a queer rigged craft, and no mistake, eh, Sora Lucia? isn't that your experience? You'll have a deal to do with their tempers in the way of your business, I'll be bound.'

'Well, Sor Drea, it's rather like the pins and needles—there are all sorts. And it just makes the difference how much you can pay for them,' said the little woman primly, smoothing down the neat cuff of her sleeve.

'Lucia likes women better than men; they walk about the room without making a noise; and they understand about trimmings,' remarked Palmira, with a toss of her head.

'Eh, little one, and who asked *your* opinion? Little girls should be seen, you know, seen and not heard of—not heard of,' said the old man in a voice of affected rebuke. He put out his hand, and the child came up to him instantly, nestling against his shoulder, and rubbing her thin little cheek on the rough sleeve of his coat. 'I don't mind, I'm not afraid, if you *do* make a noise,' she said softly in his ear.

'Nay, nay, child. But you should mind. Little girls must mind what is going on about them, else how are they ever to learn their manners before they grow up?' said Sor Drea, still in an admonitory tone, but patting the little face near him as he spoke with a smile which the child understood better than his words. And then he looked about him, 'Well, Dino—Italia, my

girl!—and how about our supper? are we not ready for that birthday supper yet?' he said aloud.

Italia had moved away, and was standing beside the window. She was perfectly aware that Dino had followed her there, but some sudden new shyness kept her silent and wondering at herself. She had pushed back the scanty curtain, and stood leaning her forehead against the coolness of the window-pane. Outside all was darkness, and one heard the sound of the breaking waves. It was a rough night, she thought to herself: and tried to say it, but somehow she could not speak: the words stuck in her throat, and would not frame themselves. In that singular moment she seemed to be leading a double life;—the old existence was there, the old safe habit

of home and her father's voice heard beside the fire; and here—here was something different, an unknown feeling of oppression—an anguish of self-consciousness, pierced with sudden flashes of a new unfamiliar joy. And yet this was only Dino, whom she had known all her life; Dino, her old tyrant and protector and playfellow——

'You are not angry now? My father did not mean all that he said; he did not mean to be unkind—to you,' she said abruptly, turning her face still farther away and looking out into the blackness.

There was no answer for a moment, and her heart began to beat faster.

'It is—it is a very rough night,' she said in a still lower voice, the words forcing themselves out at last. And then she turned her head slowly towards him.

She did not lift her eyes to his face, but she was aware that he moved. He had been leaning one arm against the window-frame; her own hands were clasped together and resting upon the ledge. She saw him move his arm—and felt the warm pressure of a strong hand laid upon both of hers. She stood quite still, breathing very softly.

'Italia!'

He was gazing at her with all his soul in his eyes—with a transfigured face which she had never seen before—he spoke in a new voice. 'Italia!' Was it a prayer—a command? The girl shivered from head to foot. She turned very pale, and then, slowly, she lifted up her glorious eyes full of a new resplendent light of joy, and they stood silent for a long, long moment, gaz-

ing at one another with the full, serious inquiring look of familiar souls new met in some strange heaven.

'Italia!' said her father's voice again, and she turned to him at once with a simultaneous movement of her whole being. These last moments were not a thing to be thought of now; she put them entirely on one side with a feeling of definite possession; it was something to be remembered and realised later on, when she was alone. She went up now to her father and laid her little hands upon his shoulder caressingly, with something of the sensation of having returned to him from afar. Her face was a little pale perhaps, but she smiled, and no one noticed her paleness. It is the way with the great crises of our mental experience: they pass us by in silence. Angels

visit us for good or ill; the shadows of night gather deeper, or our dawn grows red with promise—and nothing has taken place which was noticeable even to very affectionate eyes. It is not all insensibility in the lookers-on. At every marriage procession, as at every funeral, there *must* be some person present whose chief interest lies in the trappings—in the workman-like manner in which the wheels go around a corner, and how the horses carry their heads. And life teaches that, as it teaches patience.

It was some time before anything more was said concerning Dino's prospects. When a man's daily food is the measure of his degree of success in the world, conversation at table means chiefly an interruption. So that it was some time before

old Drea pushed away his plate and drew his glass nearer, rubbing the back of one hand across his lips with a deep-drawn breath of satisfaction, while with the other he fumbled in his pocket for his pipe. It was only a small flask of cheap thin country wine which stood upon the table before him, but he passed it over to Dino with an air of simple satisfaction and pride, a cordial and affectionate pleasure in his own hospitality, which might well have softened a harsher beverage.

'Drink, lad. Don't stint yourself. Wine was made for drinking. Lord, 'tis one more reason for not being a woman. Look at Italia there. You'd think an old sailor's daughter would know better than to care for any water that isn't salt-water, eh, boy? And Sora Lucia, too, sip, sipping, with her

head on one side like a fly. But there, she is not to be laughed at, for a pluckier little woman—— Lord, how she did fight that wind! You didn't well know which of you was running away with the other, eh, Lucia? Well, well, after all, a fly kicks as hard as it can——'

'Did Lucia kick? I should have liked to see her,' said the child Palmira, looking up. A smile like her brother's smile lit up with a sudden brightness her pale, small face.

'Indeed, Sor Drea was far too busy thinking of his boat—he knows nothing about what I did,' the little dressmaker retorted briskly, with a toss of her head, which made the black beads glisten. Her face, too, was warmed and dilated by the sense of plenty about her—the wine and

fire and supper. Her black eyes shone demurely, the hollow cheeks were flushed, she had lost for the moment something of her habitual air of suppression—an air of decent disappointment with life.

The old man laughed good-humouredly. 'Hark to her—hark to the child, will you? Ay, quick and sharp, and down on you before you know where you are. She's her mother's own daughter—in all but looks. She was always a tall girl, was Catarina, and a step and an eye like a queen, an eye that went through you. But never you mind, Lucia; 'tis better to be the head of an eel than the tail of the biggest sturgeon, to my way of thinking. Ay, do your best in this world as you find it, and if any one else can do better, why, let 'em show you how 'tis done. That's my

way of thinking. And now——' he leaned back, thrusting both hands into his trousers pockets and shifting his pipe to the other corner of his mouth. 'And now about this business of yours, lad?'

Dino looked up with a start from his occupation of drawing patterns upon the table with a little heap of breadcrumbs. 'I wanted to ask your advice about that,' he began doubtfully.

'Well, ask it. Advice costs no headache, boy. You may borrow another man's compass to steer by even when he can't lend you the wind. Stop a bit, though. We'll begin with the beginning, by your leave.' His face, which time and exposure to the weather had so stiffened and tanned that it had grown well-nigh impossible to detect any of the slighter

changes of expression upon it, his face looked as rigid and impassive as a piece of wood. 'It's really all over with you now at your office? no chance of making it up again with the masters? they wouldn't take you back again, eh?'

'Why, as for that,' said Dino hastily, 'I would not go back if they all came here together, in a body, to ask me.' He looked across the table at Italia. 'I am an eel's head too, sir,—like Lucia there,' he said smiling. 'I've been a sturgeon's tail long enough. I'm tired of being wagged when I'd rather be quiet.'

'And so you want to show your teeth, you young rascal!' called out Drea, with another great laugh, and filling up his glass. 'Nay, lad, but it is a pity you were not bred for a sailor. You've a good

notion of your own, too, about handling a boat. But your mother would never have heard of it, not she. Bless you! she's been up too much to the Villa to see the old Marchesa—by her leave and meaning no offence—to listen to reason. That's the way with women: they want a bit of every shining thing they see. And nothing's too good for them. It's my belief they'd use diamonds to fasten up their sleeves with if they could get at 'em, and think nothing of it.'

'I know we should want to begin by fastening up yours, father,' said Italia in her soft gentle way. Her glance met Dino's as she spoke, and she looked down again with smiling lips and cheeks grown suddenly red.

'Your mother was always a proud woman,

always,' the old man went on meditatively, staring at the blue rings of smoke curling up from his pipe. 'She took life hard. And she meant to make a gentleman of you from the first. She was proud; that is why she married your father. And she did not want you down on our level. She meant to make a gentleman of you, you see——'

'A fine gentleman!' Dino burst out eagerly. 'Sor Drea, is this fair? Have I ever had, have I ever wanted, other friends than you? I don't know what you mean by talking about different levels; but Italia knows—you ought to know—if I have ever done anything to deserve to have this said to me. Why, all the happiness I have ever had in my life I have had here,' he said, with a quick comprehensive glance around him at the old familiar walls. All

the associations of his boyhood seemed lurking in those shadowy corners. 'I can understand that you are not particularly well satisfied with me now. I'm not particularly well satisfied with myself. It's not a brilliant look-out for the future. But why shouldn't I work as well as another man? They never found any fault with my work in that infernal office. Why, even the head clerk there—Sor Checco—he hates me—if he owned a donkey he would call it Dino for the pleasure of kicking it; but even he could never find fault. There's plenty to be done. My mother, now, her one idea is to go up to the Villa to talk to the Marchesa——'

'Ay, 'tis a good plan—a good plan. Look there, now! I should never have thought of that. But she has a head on

her shoulders, has your mother,' the old man said admiringly, clapping the palm of his hand down heavily upon the table. Fill up, boy, fill up, and we'll drink good luck to her going. That's right and as it should be. For one works for the masters here as one prays to the saints in Heaven, and they know best what's wanted in both places. Lord bless you! if one had to stop to discuss matters with 'em, there 'd be no time left to work in. That's my way of thinking. *Commanda chi pol e obidisca chi deve.* 'Twould be a poor way of travelling if all the crew wanted to steer.'

'Why, as to that——' began Dino, pushing away his glass impatiently. 'Look here, Sor Drea. You were speaking of my father a moment ago. I was very fond of my father——'

'Ay, lad.'

'You never knew him well. You never understood him.'

Old Drea took his pipe out of his mouth and looked at it carefully. 'Perhaps not,' he said.

'You never understood him. You thought he was aping the manners and customs of his betters, when all the while —poor father! But let that pass. He taught me one thing, at any rate, for which I am more thankful to him every day that I live. He taught me that there are wants and wishes in a man — yes, and rights too — that are too strong to be choked off with a good dinner, and too old to be taught to drop curtsies to every fine dress and fine title they may chance to come across. I'll have nothing to do with it

all, for my part—nothing. And I've told my mother so. If she chooses to depend upon the old Marchesa's protection, well and good. Perhaps it suits a woman's nature to sit through rainstorms waiting for the sun to shine. I know nothing about it. I only know it doesn't suit me. I went into that office to please my mother, and I'm ashamed of having been in there. I'm ashamed of having held my tongue for three years for the sake of wearing a black coat and having the office boy answer, "Yes, sir!" when I told him to fetch me a glass of water. They were quite right to turn me out for taking part in that demonstration: it was a foolish thing in itself, but what it meant wasn't foolish. And it meant more than they knew. As for myself,' the young man

added vehemently, with a sudden flush all over his pale dark face, 'I agree with my father, if I had the power. I would make every title in Europe a thing to put into a museum, along with the other dead things in the dust. I am a Republican.' He looked straight across the table at Sor Drea. 'I am a red Republican,' he repeated.

'Ah!' said Italia quickly, and turning, laid her hand in mute appeal upon her father's arm.

But he only patted the little hand kindly, looking back at Dino with more of amusement than surprise in his keen old eyes. 'Ay, lad. We've all been young in our time,' he said simply. 'Things never struck me in that fashion; but there! it's all a matter of chance, like

having the fever. Perhaps if they'd fastened me up in a black coat and tied me by the leg to a desk when I was a youngster like you, things 'ud have seemed different to me. I might have been longer finding out for myself that the sun goes on shining just the same if you keep your own umbrella shut or open. The good God lets us do, but he doesn't let us overdo. Mind that. There's things that are settled for us; settled before we were born; but it takes a baby a good while to make quite sure that the walls of the house can't be got to move by its pushing at 'em—that's one way I used to keep my little girl there quiet when she was a mite of a thing, so high, when she used to cry to come and sit beside me in the boat while I was cleaning the fish, and believed she was making the

water rock her by shaking the rudder with her soft little fingers. Ay, so she did—so she did.'

He puffed slowly away at his pipe as if he had finished speaking. But when Dino leaned forward as if about to reply, the old man checked him with a warning movement of his finger. He was evidently ruminating some plan, for presently he added:

'I'm not blaming you for what you've done, lad—though, Lord, Lord, what a chap the one must be who let you do it! But there—it takes all sorts of days to make up one week. And I'm not saying you are not as well out o' that place as in it. There are some men that its cheaper to lose 'em than to find 'em;—ay, and places too. The bread of service is baked with

seven crusts;—it's not suited to every man's stomach. Look, my Dino,' the old man added slowly. 'We are all friends here—Lucia and all of us. And I've known you, man and boy, since you and the child there used to play i' the old boat together. I never had a son of my own, but if I had had there 'ud be two of us to keep, and two of us to look after the little girl; that 'ud be all the difference. And if you're minded, now you're out of other work, if you're minded to come and have a try at it, lad, why, there's my hand on it. There's plenty wouldn't let another man set his foot in their boat unless they could clap a plaister o' stamped paper on the spot he first stepped on, but that's not my way o' thinking. An old ox keeps a straight furrow. We don't need 'greements, you

and I. We'll just have Sora Lucia there to witness, and there's my hand on it if it pleases you to say "Done!" '

The three silent spectators of this scene had been listening to what was said in feminine fashion, watching the faces of the two men rather than their words, and now, as they clasped hands across the supper table, Italia could no longer control her excitement. Her hands turned cold: she rose from her seat: she went up to Lucia and threw her arms about the good little woman's neck.

'There, my little girl, there. It's nothing to cry about,' the old father said tenderly. He turned to Dino. 'There's two of us to look after her and take care of her now.'

'So help me, God, I will,' the young

man answered passionately. He looked at Italia full in the face.

'I am her servant. I would give my life for her, and she knows it,' he said simply, with all his soul lighting up his eager eyes.

Her hand was hanging loosely by her side; he took the little hand in his and looked at it for an instant, and raised it to his lips and kissed it.

'I am her servant, if she will have me,' he said.

Before any one had time to answer there came a loud sharp knock at the outer door.

CHAPTER III.

THE YOUNG MASTER.

The young man who entered—not waiting to have his knock answered, but throwing the door wide open before him with an easy air of good-natured authority—this newcomer, was dressed in the uniform of an officer of the King's Guards. As he came into the low smoke-embrowned room he was at once the brightest object there; the firelight caught and flashed upon all manner of resplendent buttons and knots and gold lacings, and on the shining hilt of his sword. His long, glittering spurs rang sharply against the bare stone floor. 'It

is the Prince out of the fairy tale, Italia; the fairy Prince,' said little Palmira breathlessly, and stared with her great brown eyes, clutching at Italia's hand.

'The Marchese Gasparo! the young master!' old Drea cried out in a loud voice, pulling off his round woollen cap.

They all stood up, even Dino, who strolled away a few steps from the table to the fireplace, where he began fingering a small dusty model of a boat: it had stood in that same place, between two handfuls of shells, as far back as he could remember anything.

'I only came home to-day. I've lost no time in looking you up, old Drea. My mother was not expecting me back so soon, and half the rooms are shut up at the Villa —the house is as musty as a tomb. It

was so dull I couldn't stay in after dinner,' the young Marchese said, with a quick, comprehensive glance at the two women present. His open face grew still more frankly bright at the sight of Italia; he took a step forward and doffed his cap, and made her a profound and smiling bow.

'And this is my little playmate, then; *this* is the little girl who used to go out with us in the old boat while Drea was teaching me to fish,' he said, looking at her hard.

'Ay, she's grown, she's grown, my little girl has. Per Bacco! it's six years now, or more, since you have seen her; it's no wonder if you find her changed, signor Marchese.'

'I find her—changed!' the young man echoed, smiling. The tone of his voice

was a *résumé* of all unspoken compliments. There could be no doubt of what he thought of this alteration ; and Dino, by the fireplace, looked around with a sudden sharp pang of jealousy and wonder.

He had not spoken, but no movement seemed to escape the soldier's quick keen glance.

'What ! Dino ?—Dino de Rossi ? Why, man, what is the matter with you ? You look like a thunder-cloud. Aren't you glad to see me home again, then ?' the young Marquis asked laughingly, and was pleased to hold out his hand to his old acquaintance and foster-brother, bidding him cheer up and not stand there sulking, 'if it were only out of respect to the signorina's beautiful eyes.'

'Nay, she is no signorina ; her name

is Italia, at the signor Marchese's service,' old Drea interposed, gravely enough. Young men would be young men; but it would be well if the Marchese Gasparo should recollect the difference, and to be spoken of in this way by one of the 'padroni' brought with it an uneasy sense of incongruity: it was like one of the gods walking upon the earth and claiming human familiarity. Old Drea probably cared more about pleasing his young master than for any other thing in the world unconnected with Italia. He was very susceptible to the influences of education and rank. 'Ay, there are differences between us workingmen just as there are differences between the donkeys; but your cleverest donkey will only think of seven tricks, while his master can think of eight,' he had

said to Dino only a day or two before; and the fact that 'the masters' knew best was a quite unquestioned source of comfort and satisfaction to the loyal, simple-hearted old man. All genuine reverence implies a certain poetry of nature; there was a good deal of romantic admiration—the old feeling of the clansman to his chief—mixed up with the affection and respect with which he contemplated his young guest. And Gasparo was well aware of the fact. He liked the old man, too, in his way; above all, he liked to be liked. All pleasant sensations were natural to him, and the simple admiration which surrounded him now was warm and agreeable, like the sunshine. Things had not been made quite so pleasant to him at the Villa. He had found the household un-

prepared to receive him, the house in disorder, and the old Marchesa, his mother, more grimly logical than complaisant on the subject of his gambling debts. But here, at least, there was no fear of encountering irritating criticism. He was always ready to do a good-natured thing *en bon prince;* and now, as he took a seat beside the table—it was Drea's chair—and let the old man fill him up a glass of the sour wine, it was impossible altogether to resist the charm and gaiety of his manner. There was something satisfactory and winning in the very tones of his voice, in the glance of his quick smiling eyes, in the firm ready pressure of his hand. When he asked Italia to sing him a song, which he did presently, it was with the air of pleading for some favour.

'The child's ready enough to sing; and proud enough she ought to be to think you should have remembered her voice all these years. But she was always like a little singing bird, when she was no higher than my knee. Lord! how well I can remember it —taking her out with me in the old boat, and she, no bigger than that, sitting on the nets and singing away to herself, soft like, till you could think of nothing else but a summer morning, when the boat is anchored off shore, and the larks are just rising in the meadows. But there! 'tis I am keeping the Captain from his music after all,' old Drea said, with an apologetic laugh.

Italia had taken her guitar from Dino's hands; she took it with a smile and a blush, as she had taken the Captain's pretty speeches, and moved away to the other end

of the room. Her voice was the lowest, sweetest contralto. When she began to sing her face grew serious and composed.

'Why does Italia look so unhappy as that? She looks like one of the saints on the cathedral window, as if she were saying her prayers,' Palmira whispered into Lucia's ear. She was awe-struck with admiration of the Captain's sword, which he had taken off before sitting down at the table. 'Do you think, Lucia; do you think he would let me touch it if Italia were to ask him?' she said.

The Captain did not seem in the humour to object to anything. The song—or was it the singer?—had given him far more pleasure than he had expected. He told her so, after a moment's hesitation.

'Indeed, I am very glad, sir. I shall be

very glad to sing for you as much as you like, and father pleases,' Italia answered, looking at him with a great deal of kindness and pleasure. Indeed, every instinct of her nature was always prompting her to do some kindness to some one. As she sat there on her low seat, bending over her guitar, the firelight shining full upon her small dark head and flushed cheeks, and on the movement of her little brown wrists, Dino could not turn his gaze away from her. Another man's admiration is a background against which many an ordinary woman has shone clad in unaccustomed graces to her lover's eyes. But in this case Dino wanted no confirming in his devotion: it was only that seeing her there, listening to another man's compliments, had given a slight shock to the sense of unquestioning security which

had grown up with him since the very first earliest days of his love. Already he began to look back with some jealous uneasiness at the past years when Italia had seemed as much his, and as much a necessity of his being, as the breath he drew. True, he had never spoken to her about it, at least not in so many definite words; that was partly because she was still so young—only eighteen on this birthday, and partly too that there had seemed no need for vexing his mother beforehand: he had not money enough to marry upon as yet, and his mother was sure to object; she had always discouraged his being so much at Drea's. But now all these considerations seemed to go for nothing, to become futile and irrelevant seen in the light of this new possibility that another man could step in and attempt to

carry away his own especial treasure from before his very eyes. Dino had but little of old Andrea's capacity for personal reverence; there was not enough modesty in his own nature for that; so that it did not strike him as so utterly preposterous that a man in the young Marchese's position should fall seriously in love with a fisherman's daughter. On the other hand, there was always a certain doubt lurking at the bottom of his strongest assertions of equality. He had no weight of simple conviction to steady his possession of the theories which attracted him the most. There was always a struggle between his intelligence and his instincts. Things outside and away from his creed of conduct appealed to him. He could not take life simply: there was the exaggeration of effort in his innermost

beliefs. He looked at Italia: he looked with almost more than a woman's sensitiveness, to material impressions at the gallant and determined bearing of the man beside her, whose frank and noble beauty was only like an additional distinction—an emphasis of class differences. No devout believer in the divinest rights of kings could have recognised those differences more keenly than Dino did at that moment. For there is nothing ambiguous in the secret language of jealousy: 'And they say—*we* say—that one man is as good as another without regard to his rank! I was a fool—a fool,' De Rossi reflected bitterly.

Gasparo seemed to have a talent for seeing everything. He took his cigarette case out of his pocket and asked old Drea for a light; then he said: 'There *are*

changes. Why, even the old gardens up there at the Villa seem to have grown smaller. I remember I thought there was no end to them when I was a boy.'

'Ay, there's something in a place, but there's more in the eye that looks at it. And you'll have seen a many fine places since then, sir, and a many fine people, I'll warrant. It's only the little people and the little places in life that don't change much; they're away down at the bottom, in the still water, out o' reach o' the tide. You'll not find much change in us, sir. There's not a question if we're proud and glad to see you back.'

'Oh, if there's any change among you it's not of the kind I'm finding fault with,' the young man said, glancing again at Italia; 'only it makes one feel how much

time has passed. Why, you must be getting an old man now yourself, Drea—beginning to think about giving up work and settling down for a bit—while you look out for a husband for Italia. You'll need to find a good fellow. But perhaps you have done that already.'

'Nay, as for that,—the little girl can wait for a bit,—she can wait a bit yet,' her father answered slowly, taking his pipe out of his mouth and knocking the ashes on the table. 'Our girls are not like the young ladies you're accustomed to, sir,—with nothing to do but sit in their chairs while they pick and choose. Gentlefolks —Lord bless you! they've got one paradise here on earth, and, as for the other one, they've got plenty o' money to spend in masses—they've only got to pay for it.

But with us 'tis different, you see.' He took up his glass of wine, looked at it thoughtfully for a moment, and then emptied its contents down his throat with a sudden jerk of his wrist. 'And I'd never be one to urge a girl to jump at the first comer,' he said cheerfully, leaning across the narrow table to emphasise his remark. 'No, no, patience never spoilt any man's luck. And the biggest fish—they're often nearest the bottom—they're nearest the bottom, eh, Sora Lucia?'

'Gesu Maria! how should *I* know?' the little woman murmured hurriedly, with an apologetic look at the young Marchese. 'In my time we did not think these things should be discussed before young—young persons,' she said primly; it would have seemed a familiarity to her if she had used

a common expression such as, 'before young girls.'

'Nay, nay, Lucia *mia*, you won't make us swallow that!' retorted Sor Drea, with another chuckle of supreme good humour. 'You won't make us swallow it, my dear. For you'll sooner find an old man without an ache than a young girl without a lover, —eh, signor Marchese? 'Tis the good Lord who made us all, who chose to make us in that way, and where's the harm in speaking of it?' He filled his glass up with a more unsteady hand. 'There's Dino over there looking at me like a black thunder-cloud,—but I suppose I may say what I like about my own daughter in my own house,—eh, boy?'

'I was not contradicting you, Sor Drea,' the young man answered quietly.

'Nay, lad, nay, I meant no malice. But it's a poor sort of business to waste your breath whistling for yesterday's breeze. Cheer up, lad! There's always plenty o' good work to the fore when a man's ready to do it. Ready and cheery, —even the dog can earn his dinner by wagging his tail.'

Gasparo laughed. 'Well, I must be going,' he said, and stood up and put out his hand for his belt and sword. As he was buckling it about him his eye fell upon Palmira's pale intent little face. He sat down again.

'Come here, child,' he said, and held out his hand.

'Go to the gentleman, Palmira. Go and tell him what your name is, like a good little girl, and don't be frightened,'

said Lucia hastily, with a general tug at the child's frock.

Palmira looked at her with flashing eyes. 'I am not frightened,' she said indignantly, and went and stood composedly beside Gasparo's knee.

When he asked, 'Shall I show you my sword?' her eyes flashed again. She held her breath, and the colour rose in her thin little cheeks.

'May I touch it?' she asked, and drew one small forefinger carefully across the shining blade. After a moment's consideration, 'Have you killed many giants with it?' she said; 'you know—like the fairy Prince.'

'Ay, hark to that, will you? there's a brave little girl for you!' said old Drea with an inward chuckle, and an irrepres-

sible wink at Dino. 'She'd kill giants, would she? It's her mother all over.'

Gasparo laughed again. 'And what do you know about the fairy Prince?'

'Italia told me. He wore shining clothes, and a sword, and he carried away the Princess from the enchanted tower. And he was beautiful to look at,—like you, Italia said——'

'Palmira!'

'Look here, my small friend,—oh, your name is Palmira, is it? Very well, then; look here, Palmira. Did no body ever explain to you that one is not allowed in this world to repeat what other people say until one is old enough to know better? No? Well, then, remember that. No girl is ever allowed to have her own way until she is old enough

to do mischief. And now, look here.' He drew a ring off his finger, a plain band of gold set with a large turquoise. 'Do you think that is pretty?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Very pretty?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Well, then,—under the circumstances, —do you think if we asked Sor Drea, you and I, to let us give it to Italia, because it is her birthday, and because I have not brought her any other present, do you think he would let us do it, Palmira? Here, take the ring and ask him.'

Italia put down her guitar and stood up. She gave one rapid glance at Dino, and turned very pale. 'The Signor Marchese is too kind, father. Indeed, I do

not want the ring. It is—it is too beautiful for me. I should lose it.'

'Nay,' said Drea simply, 'since the signor Marchese wishes to give it to you, child——' He turned the bauble over curiously upon the curved and hardened palm of his hand. 'Craving your pardon, signor Gasparo, but is it gold?'

Gasparo put his hand up to his mouth and twisted his moustache to conceal a smile. 'Certainly,' he said.

'Real gold? *Diamine!* it is not often that I've handled it. And that little blue thing there in the middle, has that got a name of its own?'

''Tis a turquoise. They are said to bring good luck and happiness,' the young man said carelessly enough. And then he looked with a certain reproach at Italia.

'If I had known I might have found you something that would have pleased you better——'

'No one ever made me a present before. I—Father knows that I am not used to them,' the girl said shyly. She took Palmira's hand in hers, and began stroking the little fingers.

'Nay, take it, my little girl, take it. And put it away in some safe place. Keep it to be married with. 'Twill be so much money saved when we come to think of your wedding. And 'twill be a fine thing to remember—when you've got children of your own—that you were married with a gold ring off our young master's own finger. It was very kind of you to think of it, sir; it's not every one would ha' thought of anything so kind. You must excuse my little

girl if she didn't seem to thank you properly. It's only that she is not used to being made so much of; it's not that she's ungrateful or lacking in her duty.'

He spoke with a simple earnestness which was not devoid of dignity.

'I like old Drea. He's such a good old boy. There's not a more honest old fellow in Leghorn,' Gasparo said cordially, a few moments later, as the two young men came out into the cold night air together. 'The devil take that wind if it is not beginning to blow a *libeccio!* That child will be blown over the steps if you don't look after her. Been out in Drea's boat much this winter, Dino?'

'No, sir.'

'Too rough, eh? Yet I remember you used to beat me at managing a boat when

we were little chaps together. *Che diavolo!* how time flies! It seems only yesterday —until one looks at that girl in there. There's a beauty if you like. What eyes! and did you ever notice how she smiles with 'em?'

Palmira felt her brother's fingers closing with a sudden thrill upon her own. He did not answer for nearly a minute. 'If you are speaking of Italia, sir——'

Gasparo burst into a wild laugh. 'Oh, no! How could you think it? I was speaking of the other woman, of course. Maria—Lucia—what's her name? Your little dressmaking friend with the beads. How she did look at me, *per Bacco!* you would have thought I was in league with the very devil himself.'

'The women are not accustomed to

your manner, sir. You must be indulgent enough to make allowances for our ignorance. No doubt when they have found out how much your kind interest is worth——'

'Look here, my good fellow. You're my foster-brother and all that. And my mother is very fond of yours—by the way you must tell Sora Catarina to come up and see me at the Villa. But as for noticing anything which you may choose to say—why, my good Dino, you are really asking too much of me! There! Don't lose your temper—and don't swear. It's not the child's fault—is it, my dear? And so good-night to you, little one; and here's something to buy yourself sugar-plums with. Good-night! *Au revoir*, friend Dino!'

He turned abruptly on his heel and strode off down the street without waiting for an answer, the wild stormy moonlight shining full upon his handsome face. He walked on, humming an air from the new opera, and then, 'Poor devil!' he said aloud, and smiled with an easy insolent amusement.

Before her brother could speak Palmira had flung the silver coin upon the pavement. 'I don't want it; I won't have it,' she said passionately. 'I would not keep it, not—not if Italia told me to!'

She clasped both her small cold hands about one of Dino's. 'Why did he speak like that? and why did he laugh at you? He is not like the fairy Prince at all—he is like some wicked enchanter who has come to spoil everything. Oh, I liked him

so; and now I wish he had never come!' she said. 'Oh, Dino, I wish he had never come!'

And at the door of their house she still clung to her brother. 'Must you go to the club to-night? Can't you wait for some other night? Won't you come upstairs with me? Must you go?' she asked wistfully.

Dino looked down at the small earnest face and patted her cheek. 'Good-night, little one. Run along upstairs. You ought to have been in bed hours ago. Do you know what time it is, and what the mother will say to you?'

'But, Dino, are you going?'

He glanced out at the dark street. 'Yes.'

'Dino, I want to whisper to you.'

He laughed. 'You little torment,' he said, but he bent his head obediently.

'Dino, does Italia know about your going there—about the club?'

She felt him give a sudden start at the question. 'What do you mean?' he asked roughly.

'I know that every time you go there you come back looking so angry—oh, so angry! And mother cries while you are away. I've seen her when she thought I was asleep. And, Dino,' she laid her little cheek against his, 'Italia told me to take care of you. "Take good care of Dino," that was the last thing she said to me to-night. And I said I would. I wonder if I ought to let you go there?' the child said gravely.

'Did Italia say that?' He drew a long

breath, and then stooped down and kissed her. 'There, run along now. There's a good child.'

He stood waiting at the foot of the stairs till the sound of the small footsteps had stopped at an upper landing, and a shrill childish voice was heard calling out, 'I'm here. Take care of yourself, my Dino!'

Then he went out again into the street.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CIRCOLO BARSANTI.

The wind, which blew so freshly in from sea across the open space of the parade, was moaning like a wild thing, trapped and caged, in the narrow streets behind the Duomo, towards which Dino was now taking his way, with a mind full of doubt and rage and suspicion. Italia—God bless her!—at least her last words had been of him. But to think of her now was also to remember the young Marchese's look at her, the poor child! as she took his ring: his laugh as he had turned away by the quay. The remembered sound of that

laughter made Dino clench his teeth and break out into some wild bitter imprecation. 'I am like Palmira,' he said to himself scoffingly. 'I can't even hate him, and he knows it. I too wish he had never come back, because—because I liked him so!'

As he walked on his mind was full of remembrances of their old days together, when he and Gasparo had been playmates, companions, and always with that difference between them. They had quarrelled scores of times before now, and yet the old charm had never lost its power: Dino was always ready to be brought back by a look, a word, the first word of apology or regret. Regret! was it not enough for him to feel that his dear old comrade counted upon him, wanted him still, despite all his newer

friends? 'I let him whistle me back at his good pleasure, like a woman, like a dog,' he told himself moodily, and even as he said it he felt in his heart that he would let himself be called back again. Nor was he the only one: there was not one human being out of all the little circle which made up his world who did not in some degree conspire to pet and spoil the young Marchese. 'I'm a hundred times cleverer than he is,' Dino reflected for the hundredth time. 'Ay, and better read, better educated. I can feel and understand a thousand things, books, ideas, emotions, which are so many dead letters to him. And what does it all amount to? What good is it? At four-and-twenty I'm dependant on old Drea's good-nature for a chance of earning my living by doing a

common sailor's work, while *he*—— Why, if he were to change places with me here to-night, by to-morrow he would be the most popular man in Leghorn. Fortune is as much at his beck and call as any of the rest of us. And now there's Italia——'

He thought how she too would recognise the prestige of the young soldier's successes, and in what a different spirit! How often in their long talks together had they arrived at the same conclusions, but by what divergent ways? What was careless ease in her, in Dino was pure recklessness: on the one side was the freedom of unconcern, and opposed to it the freedom of desperation. And how could it well be otherwise? He was sensitive, imaginative, unlucky. And he took life hard. He could never make her understand his view

of it; it was not in her temperament to understand it. 'While the sun is shining it *can't* be dark; and she lives in the sunshine—my darling!' he thought, with a sudden revulsion, a rush of tender feeling. And she had bid the child 'take care of Dino.' He smiled to himself as he crossed over, out of the moonlight, into the great shadow of the cathedral wall.

The *café* to which he was going, and where his club met, stood at the corner of two of the narrowest streets, a small, low room, lighted from the ceiling by a row of gas jets in the form of a cross. On three sides, against the wall, were large mirrors in tarnished frames; a narrow divan covered with faded red velvet ran all around the room, and in front of this was ranged a series of small marble-topped

tables; three or four men were seated there, drinking coffee and playing a game of dominoes.

There was nothing at first sight to distinguish the place from any other establishment of the same rank and kind. It was a shabby second-rate café, of the stereotyped pattern; and even the police did not take much interest in it, although it was true that the landlord professed republican —or at least liberal—political sentiments. But in a seaport town that was to be expected; and if Jack ashore preferred drinking his glass of vermouth with the conviction that all men are free and equal —so long as they can pay for what they are consuming—why, it was not to be wondered at if the owner of a small public-house could be found to agree with him.

The 'Cross of Savoy' was shrewdly suspected to be the headquarters of one of the branch Societies belonging to the great net-work of the Circoli Barsanti. But then, again, these said Circoli, founded early in the '70's, to commemorate the name of a certain Sergeant Barsanti, accused, whether falsely or not, of having caused the death of his commanding officer during a trifling mutiny in the barracks at Padua, and himself accordingly tried and sentenced and shot; these very Circoli, were they not existing under Government permission, if not patronage? And if Government chose to ignore the fact that some freak of popular opinion had made of the murdered sergeant a popular hero and martyr, with a name that was useful to conjure by—in a word, if the authorities saw fit to connive at the

existence of these breathing-holes, these safety-valves, so to speak, of the public discontent, how in the name of common-sense were the Leghorn police to be justified in interfering? And what, in direct consequence, could be more assured than the peace of mind and general prosperity and safety of Signor Prospero Neri —respectable householder and landlord— actually seated at one of his own tables, drinking some of his own coffee with an air of confidence in, and enjoyment of, the beverage which was more than equivalent to a testimonial?

Master Prospero's peace of mind was naturally a matter of some importance in his own estimation; and yet—such a difference can be obtained in the final result by so small a change of the point of sight—

within a few yards of his complacent head, in an inner room divided from the café proper by a swinging door, painted over with cupids and arabesques, a discussion was going on at that very moment which would have filled that worthy host with horror and dismay.

Three men were seated in that inner sanctum about a small round table; above their heads a gas jet, turned up too high, flared unnoticed in the draught; there were glasses on the table before them, and a dingy carafe of water, and a pack of cards. But they had not been playing. Their attitude seemed chiefly one of expectation.

After a longer silence than had hitherto fallen upon them—a silence during which the wind was distinctly audible, rattling at

the window-shutters, and they could hear an occasional laugh and the click of glasses in the outer room,—'Who was it made the appointment with him? Was it you, Pietro Valdez?' asked the oldest man present. He spoke slowly, and with a strong German accent.

The man addressed looked up from his occupation of rubbing his moistened finger around the brim of his glass and thereby producing a series of minor musical notes. 'Ay,' he said; 'I told him.'

And then, after a pause, 'I'll answer for the lad,' he added slowly.

'Do you mean for his coming to-night, —or altogether?' the German asked abruptly, fixing a pair of piercing light blue eyes upon his interlocutor.

Valdez picked up his empty glass;

looked into it; then put it down with a sudden movement upon the table.

'I mean—altogether,' he said gravely.

The other two men exchanged glances.

'*Per Bacco!* *I* wouldn't do it! no, not for my own flesh and blood brother,—not I!' cried the third man present, bringing the open palm of his hand lightly down upon the table before him. It was noticeable that they all three moved and spoke with a certain caution and in the quietest tones possible. '*I* would not do it. I wouldn't answer for——'

The German checked his rising voice with a look. 'I have taken note of what you are prepared to do, friend Valdez. You *are* prepared?' he added sharply, with another searching glance.

Pietro Valdez lifted his melancholy eyes

from the table before him and stared the speaker straight in the face. Then his head dropped again, and he shrugged his shoulders wearily: 'I am prepared—yes. But I look like joking, don't I? It is so probable that I should select this occasion for a jest!'

'I ask your pardon, signor Valdez. I will make a note of what you have said.'

'Ay, notes, notes. But *I* see nothing done,' broke in little Pierantoni irrepressibly. 'It is all very well to say the people can wait. *Santa Pazienza!* the people *have* waited. They are getting tired of waiting now. Once, the lower down you ground them the better they submitted. We know all that—at Naples. But it's a mistake to grind a man, or a people, down

too far;—'tis so easy to grind all the humanity out of them and leave only the beast. And some beasts have teeth, and object to being baited.'

He got up and sat down again, holding his hands straight out before him and shaking his ten hooked fingers with a gesture as if he were sowing corn. 'If you shoot at the Czar of all the Russias—well, 'tis a kind of logic. You pit one autocrat against the other: Death against the Imperial Will: and the best man wins. And there's no more unanswerable argument than a rifle ball. It was our lords and masters taught us that long ago—at the Paris barricades. I say, if you shoot the Czar you prove nothing new. But to fire at a popular Prince—— To take a man at the apex of his power, in the midst of his

people, to teach him that there's no popularity, no moderation, no amount of good nature, or good intentions, or good luck even, that can alter the eternal justice of things—— That's not stabbing at a King: it's putting your knife into the Institution; cutting the throat of royalty itself—and not merely royalty as a political institution, but royalty as a symbol of social inequality. Is it vengeance? I protest that it is no more an act of vengeance than the sentence of a judge. Have we not tried them, these Kings? *Cristo Santo!* have we not tried 'em and found 'em wanting? Is it a murder? do you call it murder when a man shoots down a bandit—an outlaw—with a price upon his head? And they *are* outlaws,' he added with a short laugh. 'Ay, and they

wear their crowns for a purpose. 'Tis a shining target at the least——'

'*Bene.*' The German contemplated him for a moment with an air of faint amusement; then rose slowly from his place at table and moved with a cat-like step towards the door. He stooped his shaggy head and looked long and deliberately through the keyhole at the various occupants of the adjoining room. '*Bene.* 'Tis all safe. But eloquence like our Pierantoni's is apt to attract—crowds,' he said, looking up again with a sudden peculiarily simple and artless smile.

The little Neapolitan leaned half-way across the table, his black eyes flashing. '*Per Cristo!*—you suspect some one? some —traitor?'

'Traitors? 'tis a word you are fond of

using, you Italians. I look at things differently. Why should we expect a new experience in life from that of other men? A man lives with his enemies; if he is lucky, he may meet with his friends.' He looked at Valdez as he spoke: he was always looking at Valdez, who bore his scrutiny with the most unaffected unconcern. 'As for suspecting, I suspect,—every one,' he said. 'It is my business to suspect. And for convenience sake I begin with the suspicion of our worthy landlord.' And, with a quick side-glance, he added lightly, 'Valdez, you see, our friend Valdez does not answer for *him*.'

'Nay,' said Valdez slowly, 'I say nothing for or against him. He is one of those men in whom necessity is the mother of virtue. He'll walk straight enough if you

watch him carefully. He won't run off the line so long as there are no corners.'

At this the German made some inarticulate sound of assent, and for a time again relapsed into silence. Finally, as some neighbouring clock struck the hour of eleven, he looked up with another grunt. 'This place closes in half an hour. The young man is not coming,' he said.

'He will come,' Valdez repeated calmly.

'*Per Bacco!* if he doesn't——'

But even as Pierantoni opened his lips to speak the gaily-painted door behind him opened quickly and softly, and was as softly shut.

'Am I late?' asked Dino, looking all about him.

There was more curiosity than excitement in the expression of his face.

'I thought you told me it was to be an especially important sort of meeting? Why, where are the others? There's no one here!' he said, in a hurried aside to Valdez as he drew up a chair and took his place at the table beside his friend. Pierantoni's face he knew by sight already, but he gazed at the stranger present with considerable interest and wonder, noting each personal peculiarity of his appearance, his careless dress, his broad shoulders and large very white hands; he wore a large and valuable ring upon one of them, and there was an ugly scar, the red mark of an old wound, across his wrist. Dino could not keep his eyes from it. He had always longed to see this man. The German leaned back quietly in his chair.

'Your name is Bernardino de Rossi.

You are Livornese by birth,—twenty-four years old. You have belonged to this Society for nearly three years, having been introduced and vouched for by Signor Pietro Valdez, here present. And for the last four years—for the last five years, if I mistake not,' he hesitated for an instant and appeared to consult his memory, 'you have held a position in the Telegraph Office of Leghorn. I believe I am right in all these particulars?'

'Perfectly right. It is nearly five years. I was nineteen when I went into the office,' said Dino promptly, though not without a little inward astonishment. What had this meeting then to do with him? and why had Valdez not spoken more clearly? But he was soon to know.

'And three weeks ago a slight dis-

turbance—a regretable disturbance—connected with a small demonstration in favour of General Garibaldi, took place. The procession was dispersed by the police, but not before you had been recognised as being implicated in it. In consequence of this, and partly, also, because of your refusing to give up the name of one of your fellow-clerks who was known to have been there with you, you were unfortunately dismissed from your post this morning. I say unfortunately because, for some few weeks at all events, you will now be placed under police surveillance. You should have been more careful, sir!' the speaker concluded brusquely.

This man had the power of assuming at will an indescribable air of ease and

authority. All traces of his former manner of lounging good-nature had vanished. His voice even was changed. He spoke now with the clearness and rapidity of a man accustomed to undisputed command. 'You should have been more careful, sir. You have lessened your chance of being useful.'

Dino felt himself going red and white by turns.

'There was no other choice, your—your—sir! I mean,' he said after a moment. 'The man you speak of—he's no friend of mine—depended upon my holding my tongue. I was bound as a gentleman not to betray him.'

'The Society has nothing to do with your being, or not being, a gentleman, sir!' the great man interrupted sharply,

and looking at Dino with not unkindly eyes. 'You will attend to what I say, if you please, as at present you are merely wasting my time in this matter.' He glanced across at Valdez, and then tapped the table before him thoughtfully with his finger-tips: it was the hand on which he wore his great signet ring, and the brilliants which surrounded it glittered oddly enough among the heaps of tobacco ash and burnt-out matches which littered the mean little table.

'H—m,' he said thoughtfully; and turning his eyes abruptly upon De Rossi, 'You know who I am?' he demanded. 'Ah—I see you do. Well, that simplifies matters. You will understand how it is that I am giving you these orders. I suppose there is no need of my reminding you of the

new—the special engagements you entered into on the day following the little *émeute* we have spoken of——?'

'Ah!' said Dino, suddenly straightening himself upon his chair.

Valdez lifted his eyes quickly, then let them drop again. The lad was beginning to understand.

'You and one other man placed yourselves on that occasion on the Society's list of volunteers. I don't know how much you meant by doing so, but that's not my affair. You would not have been accepted if you had not been considered a fit person—and properly vouched for. It seemed hardly probable at the time that any very especial service would be demanded from you, but of course you took your chance of that. I have known men wait for

years and years without getting such a chance; but you are to be congratulated, young man, you are more fortunate than they.'

There was a dingy carafe standing in its little saucer on the centre of the table. Dino reached over and poured himself out a glass of water; he swallowed it down at a gulp. Then he leaned deliberately back in his chair. He had turned very pale, and his eyes were shining.

'What is there to be done, sir? I'm ready,' he said quietly.

The German looked at him grimly enough for a moment, and then for the first time his face relaxed into its wonderful child-like smile.

'*Schön*,' he said approvingly. Then, with a sudden reassumption of his former

manner, 'Have you any present means of support? What are you going to do with yourself at once?' he demanded.

Dino told him.

'Very well then. For the next fortnight you will go about your work in the boats, and you will be careful to give cause of suspicion to no one. You observe that I say *to no one*. If you have a—a *mädchen* whom you fancy yourself in love with, you will remember that the Society does not admit of rivals. At the end of the fortnight you will be sent to Rome, means being provided for your journey. And in the meantime you will not show yourself again at this club. Whatever orders you may need will reach you through Signor Valdez.'

There was a moment's pause. 'And—

and what am I to do in Rome when I get there?' Dino asked presently. His lips had turned dry again: he found a certain difficulty in speaking.

'You will leave Leghorn on the 11th or 12th of next month. On the 13th of April His Majesty, King Humbert, will hold a grand review of his troops in the new quarter of the Macao, near the railway station. The Queen will be present at the ceremony with the court and the young Prince. The King will appear riding at the head of his staff. You will take up your place in the crowd at the corner nearest the Royal carriages. His Majesty will pass you twice—coming and going; the second time he passes——'

They had all drawn nearer the small table as he went on speaking in lower and

lower tones; and now the four faces were very close together.

'And then?' Dino tried to say, but his lips only moved. He had no voice in which to frame the words.

'Signor Valdez is nearest to you. Tell him, Valdez,' the German said peremptorily, and threw himself back in his chair.

And then Dino felt Valdez's warm breath in his ear. He heard certain words which, for a moment, seemed to convey no meaning. He looked straight across the room at the foolish painted door through which he had entered. He felt thirsty again—that intolerable thirst! and the gas flickered and made a curious sound—like a whistle; and—and——

He stood up suddenly in his place, and

stared at the three impassive faces before him. They were all watching him.

'My God!' he said in a broken whisper; 'great God! *you want me to assassinate the King!*'

CHAPTER V.

RETROSPECTIVE.

In less than half an hour he had left the place. Valdez accompanied him as far as the café door, but there, with scarcely the exchange of a word, they parted.

'Are you not going home, lad? Go home and get some sleep,' the elder man said, speaking in a tone of great kindness and friendliness. And yes, Dino admitted, he was tired. And with that they separated: but he would not go home yet. With the instinct of one born and brought up by the sea, it was to the sea he turned, naturally and unconsciously, as another man

might have turned to an open window. He walked fast until he reached the low parapet which runs along the embankment of the public walk; but, once there, his pace slackened. The night was growing quiet; the wind had fallen perceptibly with the setting of the moon. There were many clouds still, but broken and moving; and clear dark spaces of the sky where the stars sparkled frostily. Below, the water was still restlessly leaping and falling beneath the low sea-wall, a dark unquiet surface crossed with long pale streaks of foam. He walked up and down, slowly, by the edge of a clump of ilex trees, his hands in his pockets, his head a little bent, in the attitude of a man who is thinking intently. Now and then, at the louder splash of some wave which broke

higher than its fellows, he lifted up his face automatically and looked about him with a blank, confused stare. In truth he was feeling little more than an overwhelming sense of confusion; nothing seemed real, within or without; he was only conscious that all was changed around him, and he could not realise the blow.

Dino's strongest personal impressions, all his most treasured boyish remembrances, were in some way connected with his father, who had died young, and when the boy was not more than twelve or thirteen years of age. Any one else remembering Olinto de Rossi—had there indeed been any one left in the very least likely to speak of him—any other person would, in all probability, have summed him up briefly as a handsome, fickle, en-

thusiastic young man, who—having begun life with a tolerable fortune, a persuasive tongue, a singularly equable and lovable temper, and an absolute incapacity for denying himself the smallest satisfaction—had ended by dying miserably of consumption at thirty-five; having in the interval married; spent all his money; and earned for himself some measure of local notoriety as a sort of popular demagogue, a speaker and leader at democratic meetings.

Chance having thrown him, while very young, among men of determined political sympathies, he had insensibly acquired so many of their opinions, which he afterwards retailed and amplified with so much natural ingenuity and eloquence, as to have earned no slight fame for himself as a radical patriot of extreme views. In

point of fact, he had taken to speech-making in the first place, almost by accident, and as he would have taken to drink, or to gambling, or to any other form of excitement which appealed to his pleasure-giving, pleasure-loving nature. And having once begun to taste the sweets of popularity, he was fascinated by them; he required no especial convictions, the applause and admiration he received were quite enough to determine his vocation.

But it was not to be supposed that a reputation obtained in this manner could last for ever, or indeed for very long. Before many years had passed there had come a sensible diminution in the number and the fervour of De Rossi's political adherents. The elder men of his party had long since ceased to take serious

notice of his impassioned prophecies ; and now even the editors of the fiercest socialistic papers—the compiler of *Il Lucifero* of Ancona, and the gentleman who was responsible for the appearance of the Leghorn *Thief*—even they had begun to fight shy of their old and brilliant contributor. By the time little Dino was old enough to become his father's companion, following him about from meeting to meeting with undoubting, enthusiastic admiration and love, it is probable that the faith and awe the elder De Rossi excited in his little listener was very nearly the sum total of the credence he received.

On the whole, this defection did not depress him seriously. Perhaps he never thoroughly believed in it, or that he had in any way deserved it ; one's own account

of one's motives, and the way they strike a friend, often bearing much the same relation to each other as a photograph does to a portrait. Each represents the same individual; but one is fact; the other may be a poem. And from first to last Dino saw nothing but the poem; his father treating him throughout with a gentleness, a pride in his clever boy, and an amount of expansive affection, which cost him nothing, and which bound the lad to him with a more than common reverence and love. As for his wife, for Dino's mother, she was by nature a silent woman, who did not need to express all that she thought; and this, Olinto sometimes reflected, was perhaps fortunate: the view other people take of the less admirable consequences of our actions being apt to

strike one as morbid. After all, her husband was never positively unkind to her. He had never purposely deceived her. He was simply an ordinary man; selfish, good-humoured, eager for any new amusement; a creature of fine moments and detestable habits. And, after all, when his wife had married him it was because she wanted to do so; because nothing else could or would satisfy her. If she had made a mistake, well! perhaps he too had had his illusions. And it is the law of life—a woman loves what she can evoke, but what she *marries* in a man is not his best, but his average, self.

Being gifted with a perfect, an unalterable good humour, De Rossi accepted his wife's altered opinion of him as he accepted the reduced circumstances of his material

life : both were more or less of his own making, and between them they troubled him but very little. His experience of life was a succession of easy contentments. He enjoyed his own emotions. He liked sinning as he liked repenting, and in both phases he was alike sincere—and unreliable. He was capable of the deepest enthusiasms—the tenderest emotions—but he was unable to master his own shifting moods for a week. His facile nature lapsed away from the highest points it reached with the inevitableness of water which seeks its level. He was attractive ; he was weak ; he was untrustworthy ;—and yet he was always attractive. 'The sort of man,' Valdez said of him, 'the sort of man who orders his dog "to come here," and when the beast lies down in a

corner,—"Ah, the clever dog! he knew I was going to tell him to do that next!" says my amiable gentleman.'

Before her marriage — she was five years older than her husband — Catarina had been the confidential maid of the Marchesa Balbi. She had never wholly lost her place at the Villa. When the young heir was born, a month or two after the birth of Dino, she was, at her own earnest entreaty, made the *balia* of the little Marchese. Whenever the family came to Leghorn she was always going up to the Villa; the Marchesa was perpetually sending for her. There was no great mental barrier between the Italian lady and her old servant: both were convent bred, with much the same sort of education —and what hopes and fears had they not

shared since then in common! Catarina would stand for hours at the foot of her old mistress' sofa, talking to her in undertones of things which every one else had forgotten. The two women were bound to one another by a whole world of recollected emotions—the night young Gasparo was ill; his first steps; the day he had first moved alone from the arms of his nurse to the arms of his mother,—to each of them these had been events in life.

As the years went by Olinto objected less and less to his wife's frequent absences. 'She is a good woman, my Dino, but hard—hard,' he would say sometimes to his boy—and by the very passion with which the child loved him he could see how much he had inherited of his mother's loyal and serious nature. He began to fear

vaguely lest, his boy growing older, he should begin to learn to judge him—and he had grown strangely dependent on that one unhesitating faith.

Things were then in this condition, when one day, Dino being at the time some twelve years old, he was taken by his father to a political banquet, a sort of subscription supper given by one of the clubs to which Olinto had at some time belonged.

Dino never forgot that supper. There had been some objection made to his own presence when he was first taken in; high words exchanged between some of the men present and his father; sneering references, which the child only half understood, to other debts, and former feasts unpaid for. In the midst of the confusion

Dino saw his father rise suddenly from his place at the table; he looked about him, waving his hand to command silence: his face was very white.

There was a general outcry of 'Sit down! sit down!'—'It's too early yet!'—'We don't want any more speeches;' and then Dino saw the man who was sitting on his other side lean well forward and put his hand upon his father's shoulder. 'Don't try and talk to them now. Wait till after supper. And — sit down, De Rossi, do. There's a good fellow,' he said. And then, as Olinto yielded mechanically to the pressure, his neighbour drew back, looking kindly enough into Dino's terrified face.

'Don't be frightened, my little fellow. They often make a noise at these suppers.

It means—nothing,' he said, with a half contemptuous smile.

Dino looked at him for a moment in silence. Then the boy's face flushed scarlet, and his eyes filled with tears.

'It can't mean anything,' he said desperately. 'My—my father would never have brought me here if he did not mean to pay for it.' But he did not look at his father, who was arguing eagerly across the table with his opposite neighbour, and there was a lump in his throat which seemed to choke him as he spoke.

'What, are you Olinto's little chap? Is De Rossi your father? And what's your name, then? What do you call yourself, my little lad?' the stranger asked good-naturedly

'My name is Bernardo. But they call me Dino at home,' the boy said, rather huskily.

'Well, then, Dino, my boy, eat your supper, and don't trouble your head about what doesn't concern you. Your share of it shall be paid for, never fear. Now then, what's the matter now? Don't sit and stare at your father. He won't notice you. He's—busy. If you are wise you'll tell *me* what you want,' he repeated, with the same equivocal smile.

There was something in his kind and melancholy face which had won the boy's entire confidence. 'I am afraid, sir—— I don't think my father has got enough money with him,' he said hastily, with burning cheeks and downcast eyes. When he ventured to look up he met his neigh-

bour's glance fixed full upon him with a certain friendly amusement.

'So you are Olinto de Rossi's son,' he said slowly; and Dino wondered to hear him say it, for surely he knew that already. 'Well, well. *Per Bacco!* if the evolutionists are to be trusted, why, here's a curious experiment of Dame Nature's. Well, look here, my boy, did you ever see me before?'

'No, sir.'

'Did you ever hear your father speak of Pietro Valdez?'

'No, sir.'

'H—m. Well! that's my name. And I spend my time teaching people how to play the guitar, and tuning pianos: that's my trade. So now you know who I am. And I've known your father a good many

years now, first and last, a good many years. Just tell him to turn around for a moment. I say, De Rossi—— You look out for yourself; I don't want to crush you, my boy.'

He leaned well forward, and spoke in a low voice to Olinto. Dino was crouching back in his chair: he could not hear what passed between the two men; but half an hour later, and having in the meantime, and at the instigation of his new friend, partaken heartily of his supper, he had the satisfaction of seeing his father carelessly fling a gold piece into the subscription plate, where it lay and glittered obtrusively among the pile of meaner silver coins.

The boy's eyes sparkled with triumph at the sight. He looked up with a frank laugh into the face of his new companion.

'Did you see that, sir?' he asked eagerly, his face all aglow.

'Ay,' Valdez answered almost indifferently. He leaned back on his chair and contemplated the row of faces before him. 'Presently they will begin their fine speechifying. Look here, my boy, I see signs—never mind what they are—but I see symptoms of a coming row. It will be nothing to speak of, I daresay, but all the same I want you to promise me this: If I send you home, I want you to cut away at once without stopping to ask questions, do you see? Now promise me you'll do that, like a good little chap.'

'I'll stay with my father, sir. I must stay with my father. And if you please, sir, I'd rather stay, really. I'm not afraid.'

'Now, who ever supposed you were

afraid, my little man? But that is not the question. Now, look here—ah!——'

He stopped short. A sudden silence had fallen upon the room. A man near him roared out 'Hush!' and smote the table before him with his clenched fist. For the last time in his life Olinto de Rossi had risen to make a speech.

He had been very quiet all the previous part of the evening; sitting most of the time with his head leaning upon his hand, hardly speaking to any one, not even to his boy. As he rose slowly to his feet a wild burst of ironical applause greeted him from every part of the room, only Valdez sat silent and motionless, staring down at his plate with a moody troubled face. De Rossi stood leaning a little forward; his thin cheeks, which

had grown so deadly pale of late, were burning now with vivid spots of red. 'Friends,' he began, 'Gentlemen——' He hesitated for an instant, then burst into wild invective against Church and King and State. 'The State—the State, I tell you, is the very negation of liberty,' he cried, 'and no matter who command, they make all serve. You talk, some of you, of changing the political *régime*. How will you change it? For what good? If a man among you has a thorn in his foot, will it help him if he change his boots? I tell you, it is the thorn, the thorn itself, that you must get out, wrench out, cut out, if need be. We, the people, how often have we asked our rulers for bread and they have given us a stone? Yet this is scarcely prudent, friends, for a stone

is a fair missile. What! will they live on in their princely palaces and offer to us, to the people, the bare right and privilege of labour? Labour! I tell you that God Himself has set His curse upon labour. I—tell—you——'

His voice had failed him suddenly. He put his hand up to his head, staring wildly about him.

'Go on, go on. That's the right sort of stuff. Down with everything. A general mess and scrimmage, and myself dancing on the top of it; that's your real radical programme. That's what you call reform!' a man in the crowd at the foot of the table cried out derisively. There was a general laugh; some indication of a wish to hustle him into silence; some shouts of '*Viva* De Rossi!' The

men had all been drinking freely, and were ripe for any mischief.

'I say, De Rossi, get up on your chair, man. We can't hear you,' some one called out again; the suggestion was received with another hoarse roar of approval. Two or three men moved towards the orator as if with the intention of forcing him to adopt this new position.

'For God's sake, can't you let the man alone? Don't you see that he is ill?' cried Valdez, suddenly starting forward.

Some one, more humane than his fellows, had poured De Rossi out a glass of wine. He lifted it to his lips now, facing them all, with flushed face and wild glittering eyes, 'I drink to your health, gentlemen!'

He stood so for a second amidst frantic

shouts of applause, with one hand outstretched. To Dino's eyes he looked like some demi-god mastering a whirlwind. And then all of a sudden the brimming glass slipped from his nerveless hand, and was dashed into a thousand pieces. He watched it fall with a half-bewildered laugh; he staggered, and clutched at the table; a sudden red mark discoloured his smiling mouth, and he fell heavily forward, face downwards, without a word or a groan.

He had broken a blood-vessel; he was still insensible as they carried him back to his home through the dark and empty streets; and Dino walked beside the litter and held his father's hand. His wife met them at the door with Palmira, who was then a baby, in her arms. Her face seemed turned to stone as she

listened to Valdez's explanations. Only, as they laid her husband gently down upon his bed, and uncovered his face, a quick spasm contracted her rigid mouth, and she stooped and kissed the dying man upon his forehead.

'I knew it would come. It had to come,' she said drearily. And after that she scarcely spoke again, turning away from all consolation, and seeming to find relief only in the few practical cares which were left to her.

And so, like some impatient wave breaking too far from shore, whose troubled existence reaches its climax in but one instant of wasted force, in the midst of a sea where every wave which lifts itself must fall, so Olinto died, and his idle raving was hushed, and his place

knew him no more. Of mourners he had few or none; it was only to his boy that he left so much as a memory. That was almost the lad's entire heritage, that and the friendship of Pietro Valdez.

As little Dino grew up every other detail of his life seemed to change about him, as things do change in the lives of people too poor to order their surrounding circumstances. The Marchesa came less and less often to the Villa Balbi; he had lost the familiar companionship of his foster-brother; of his first childish recollections there was only old Drea left, and the dear face of Italia, to illuminate the past. But, whatever else was altered, he had never lost sight of Valdez. Indeed, since that night the man seemed to have taken a strange fancy to the boy; as the

years went on those two were always more and more together; an arbitrary friendship, in which one was ever the leader and teacher and guide.

Even to Dino there was always a certain mystery about Valdez, but it was the mystery of pure blankness; there were no secrets about him, chiefly because he seemed to own no history. He never willingly spoke of himself, or alluded to former acquaintances or habits. If he had any one belonging to him, if he had ever been married, no one precisely knew. He never spoke to women, or appeared interested in them. He lived alone, where he had lived for twenty years, in two small rooms in one of the narrowest streets of Leghorn. His wants were few and unchanging, and the money which he earned

amply sufficed for them. In his working hours he followed his trade, as he called it, with the sober exactitude and indifference of a machine. He was a Spaniard by birth, and a Protestant by conviction; and he believed in a coming universal republic as he believed in the rising of the sun. After a dozen years of companionship that was the most that Dino knew of him.

. . . . .

As he paced up and down there by the sea, a hundred confused images and impressions came floating back out of that past to Dino. His father's face, and the unforgotten sound of his voice,—Sor Checco, Gasparo, Drea, dear old Valdez, and those men at the café to-night, and the scene this morning at the office, and the scene at the banquet, that other night, long ago,—how long ago it seemed! It was as if

some storm-wave breaking over his life and soul had stirred the very depths of old remembrance, until he could scarcely distinguish the actual from the past, the living from the dead. They were all mixed up with the darkness and the wind and the sense of the restless seething water about him.

When he thought of Italia he stopped short. He could not, he *would* not think of Italia—not then. He could bear nothing further to-night, he told himself, with a curious sense of relief and quiet. The measure was full; he could realise nothing more. And, indeed, beyond great pain as beyond great joy, there is this mysterious region of rest. Great passions end in calm, as the two poles are surrounded by similar spaces of silent, ice-locked sea.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MORNING AFTER.

A WOMAN'S anxiety is always awake, always asking. She entreats to know in direct proportion to her dread of the coming knowledge. How could it well be otherwise, while her life is one frail tissue of delicate probabilities, in the midst of which she waits, like a spider in its net, for the possible gifts of fate? And the web may glisten as it will in the sunlight; it makes but a poor shield against a blow.

As Catarina busied herself about her ordinary household work that next morning there were faint new lines of care about

her close shut mouth, and the orbits of her eyes were darkened as if with sleeplessness and long watching. But, whatever had troubled her, she made no direct mention of it to Dino,—setting his belated breakfast before him carefully but in silence. It was not until he pushed aside his plate and stood up, reaching mechanically for his hat, ready to go out, that she admitted to herself that if she wanted an explanation she must ask for it; or seemed to notice his movements, and even then it was only to say indifferently,

'Shall you be home to dinner? Or do you mean to stay at Drea's? is that a part of your new arrangements?'

'Nay, but, mother, I am sorry to have given you so much more trouble. The fact is I—I over-slept myself this morning.

When I came in last night I was more tired than I knew,' said Dino cheerfully.

'Ay, when you came in! When you did come! It was after ten o'clock when you brought home that blessed child, so worn out with the wind and what not that she fell asleep on my knee, bless her little heart! before I had fairly time to get her clothes off. And after that I sat up for three hours in that chair, Dino. It was striking one by the Duomo clock before I went to bed.'

She turned to the dresser by the wall and began reaching down plate after plate, and looking at each one as she wiped it. 'I had this china before you were born; the signora Marchesa took me with her to choose it—and it was my wedding present from the Villa—sent down by one of the footmen the day after I was married. I

was sitting by that window when it was brought in—a great heavy basket that the man could hardly lift upon the table—only your father helped him. And there was never a piece of it broken until you knocked down the saucer the day I asked you to help me with the cups. But it's ungrateful work taking care o' things that just end by being used by others who don't see any difference. There's a plenty o' people in the world have got brighter eyes for looking at their sweethearts with than for looking after their husband's house. Palmira tells me that my boy, my young master, is at home again, Dino?'

'Ay, signor Gasparo's here.'

'And went to see Sor Drea on his very first evening! He used to come to me. *Guarda questa!* But young men will be

young men. And 'tis true that Andrea has sense enough to look after that girl of his. She's given *you* enough encouragement——'

'Mother!' said Dino in his severest voice; a voice which secretly awed her.

He faced around suddenly, and stood looking at her as she moved to and fro.

'Mother! it is not generous, it is not kind, to speak of Italia in that fashion. And you know it hurts me. I love her,' he said, his voice changing. 'Of course I love her. I don't care who knows that I love her. But encouragement! I don't know what you mean. Encouragement from Italia! She has never thought of such a thing; she would not know what you meant——'

'Eh, don't tell me, lad. I've been a girl myself. 'Tis a poor dog that doesn't know

when he's wagging his own tail,' cried Catarina bitterly, stooping to wipe the dust off the leg of a chair with the corner of her apron. She made a busy pretence of it for a moment or two, and then her hands dropped helplessly ; she stood up and looked at her tall son. 'An' so you love her ;—you love that little girl! You never told me of it before, lad.'

'But, mother dear, you never asked me. I always thought you knew it. It was plain enough. And how was I to guess you wanted to be told? I have never even told—her,' the young man said.

'And *she* was to come first? Nay, 'tis but natural. The young birds build new nests. Ah, but, Dino! Dino! I've lost you. I've lost my own boy——'

Her voice broke : she turned abruptly

away, and hid her gray head upon her clasped hands.

'But, mother dear,—dearest mother!'

He stood with one hand on her shoulder, looking down at her bowed head with a curiously-blended feeling of distress over her grief and impatience at its unreasonableness: 'Mother! After all, you must have expected it sooner or later: it is but natural——'

'Yes, lad. I know. 'Tis as you say: 'tis natural,' Catarina said meekly; and then she turned her face away again with a sob and a feeling of utter inevitable loneliness. How could the lad understand? He was young, and she was growing old; and to him what was natural was easy, and to her it was hard. That was all the difference.

She swallowed something in her throat, a lump which seemed to choke her, and stood up. '*Poverino!* I won't tease you any more: don't be vexed with me, lad,' she said soothingly, looking into his perplexed face with a quivering smile. She put up her hand to brush off an imaginary speck of dust from his coat. 'Nay, 'tis no wonder if people love you. Go, my Dino, go to—her,' she said; and as Dino bent his head and kissed her, 'It's because I am sending him away,' she thought, bitterly enough.

'And how about Monte Nero, mother? The pilgrimage, you know. Italia was asking about it last night,' he said cheerfully, glad to see her beginning to accept things more placidly.

'Ay, lad, I'll think of it; but go now,

go. I will not—I cannot—I mean, do as you please. Make all your plans, and I will help you carry them out. It's what I'm good for now, I suppose. I must learn not to stand in your way—and hers.'

'Mother!'

'I— Don't mind me, my Dino. Don't be angry with your old mother, my own boy. It was only a—a surprise. I shall be all right when you come back; for you will come back to dinner, my Dino? I am good for that much: I can take care of you still.'

She followed him to the door, and then went and stood by the open window, shading her eyes from the bright March sun, to watch him as he passed down the street. Perhaps he would turn his head and look up. But no. From that height

she could not distinguish his face; she felt a pang of idle regret at the thought; he seemed to get so soon beyond her reach. After a while she went into her son's room, and opened all his drawers, and began to turn over his possessions. She folded an old coat which she found on the back of a chair: she folded it carefully. I am not sure that she did not kiss it. Everything belonging to him with which she had anything to do was kept in the most scrupulous order, and she wanted to find something to mend, some work which she could do for him.

There was a small faded photograph, a portrait of his father, hanging over the young man's bed. She went and looked at it as it hung against the wall, then took it down and stood with it in her hand. It

was the likeness of a man who had been in every way a disappointment in her life; but she was not thinking of that now. The faded face looked at her out of the past with its easy confident smile. She only remembered the first year or two after her marriage, and her young husband's kindness to her, and his first pride and pleasure in their boy. 'If *he* had not gone there would have been some one left to understand,' she thought. Her own personal life seemed ended: she gazed with the strangest pang of regret and companionship at this fading likeness of the dead face she had loved in her youth. What if afterwards he had neglected her? At least he had come to her once of his own accord, for her own sake—and they had been young together.

She felt herself quite alone, this austere and self-contained woman — alone in a world which could never change for the better now; in which each new morning would only bring new deprivations in place of fresh joys.

. . . . .

Dino had dressed himself in workman's clothes that morning. Drea did not expect him yet, but it was just possible there might be something which wanted doing in the boat. It was such a bright fresh morning after the storm; a morning to make young hearts beat lightly and young blood run fast with a quick sense and joy of dear life. But as he turned mechanically down the busy Via Grande he saw nothing of all this. His mother's words, the way in which she had taken it for granted that

if he loved Italia, Italia must love him, and how there could be but one possible solution to their lives, all that would have been so natural, so full of hope and radiant happiness last month, last week — last week? only yesterday, only one day ago! And now; oh, the bitter irony of fate! it was he himself who had forged the chain which bound him. He cursed his own folly. Why could he not have been contented? was he not deeply enough involved before then? why could he not have let that last crowning piece of madness alone?

The look of the commonplace crowd around him, the presence of those scores of hurrying, interested, contented, busy men, the very look of the shop windows, all things seemed to conspire together to

discredit and ridicule the devoted side, the dramatic side, the only possible side, of his situation. In a world like this—a world of common-sense and convenience and keen enjoyments, a world of sunlight and youth and possibilities, to choose deliberately, at four-and-twenty, to throw away all one's future, all one's love, all one's life in doing—*that*. Damn it! Even to himself he would never mention that accursed plan, he would never think of it.

He thrust his hands deeper into the great pockets of his rough jacket, and threw up his head defiantly, as he glanced about him. And each house he passed, each soldier, each policeman, each lamp-post even—every visible sign of peace and law and order—seemed a tangible ironical comment on his folly. And why, in God's

name, had he done this thing? He remembered so well that evening—it was after their demonstration had been dispersed by the police, and he was hot with a sense of battle, and wild with excitement, with bitter baffled indignation. It had seemed so easy a thing then to pledge away his future. He had done it without consulting Valdez—suddenly, madly, on the desperate impulse of the moment. He had done it in a moment of mental crisis; because he was imaginative, because he believed in the cause, heart and soul, because he had been a fool. And as he said that to himself some old words of Pietro Valdez came back to him with sudden force out of some old forgotten talk of theirs. 'How can any one believe in your highest emotions?' he heard the familiar

voice asking him, 'how can you expect any one to believe in your highest emotions if you question them yourself?'

The softest wind blew in his face and he did not feel it, the sunlight rested on him, the sky was blue and white; but he had ceased to look even at the passers-by. He felt like a man awakened from a dream, when a hand touched him, and a voice spoke in his ear, and he looked up and recognised the Marchese Gasparo.

'Hallo, old boy, are you asleep? are you dreaming? what the devil is the matter with you?'

They had met in front of the Giappone, the fashionable restaurant of Leghorn, where Gasparo had been breakfasting with a couple of his friends. The two other men strolled off a few paces and waited,

smoking their long thin cigars, and eyeing Dino with a languid curiosity. Gasparo, too, looked at his altered dress with some exclamation of surprise.

'What is the meaning of that new toggery?' he demanded. 'I had to look twice to make sure it was you. What are you up to now, old fellow, eh? Is all that to oblige our good Andrea?' And then, without waiting for an answer: 'See here, Dino, you're the very man I want. But stop a moment. First of all, are you going anywhere in particular?'

'I am going to Drea's,' Dino said.

'To wish our pretty little friend good morning, eh, my Dino? Jove, how pretty that girl looked in the firelight singing! But never mind that. You can do something for me before you go there, can't you?

Women are never the worse for being kept waiting; in fact, it does them good, and their hearts get softer with time, just as a peach softens when you leave it for a bit to ripen on the tree. I say, Dino, be a good obliging fellow for once. You are not really in a hurry?'

'No, sir.'

'*Benissimo!* Then you can go and do an errand for me. I want—— Look here; it's a letter I want carried. Rather an important letter. It's—it's a love-letter, in fact,' said Gasparo, beginning to laugh, 'and I want it taken to the woman with the most beautiful eyes in Leghorn—the most beautiful? well, at least I thought so until yesterday. She is—her name is written on the envelope. But it is not to be taken to her house, you understand?

She is at Pancaldi's this morning, at the Stabilimento. Go straight in to the platform where the baths are in summer; you'll find her there, looking at the waves.' He laughed, brushing up his moustache. 'So there you are; and now right about face—march! Why, man, what are you staring at? There's the letter; and I say, Dino, mind you give it to her quietly; just slip it into her hand, you know, as if it were the answer to some commission. Faith! they *are* pretty eyes, if they're not so bright as Italia's.'

Dino turned red; he drew his shoulder away from the Marchese's careless touch. 'I—— You must excuse me, sir,' he said roughly. 'Get some one else to carry your letter. I won't go.'

'Hullo!' The Marchese threw back

his head. 'Then—oh, go to the devil!' he said, and turned lightly on his heel.

He walked off for a pace or two and stopped, irresolute. It was really very awkward about that letter. He wanted it taken; he could not carry it himself, and to find another trustworthy messenger at a moment's notice—— He turned back.

'I say, old fellow, don't you think this is treating me rather badly? It is not every one whom I'd ask to do this thing for me, but you—why, we've been boys together, you and I.' A smile lighted up his handsome face. 'I'd do as much for you any day, old Dino; for you and your sweetheart.'

Among all the men of his time, the young Marchese, Gasparo Balbi, was one of the most personally attractive. He was

the most popular man in his regiment; he fascinated the very orderly who cleaned his boots, and all women and all children loved him. Wherever he went—in a ballroom, or in the streets,—people turned in the same way to look at him. His mere presence was an irresistible argument. When he talked it is possible that what he said was neither particularly fresh nor particularly new, but that did not matter; his silence and his speech were alike persuasive. He had all the qualities of a ruler and leader of men,—strong animal magnetism, an irresistible audacity, an implacable will. He was like one of the English Stuarts in his wonderful faculty of awakening passionate loyalty and enthusiasm in all who came into personal relations with him; perhaps he was still more like them

in his power of using his friends, his capacity for charming and—forgetting.

He stood there now smiling in the sunlight, like a young prince whose good pleasure it is to explain when he need only command.

'Come, my Dino; I know you better than you know yourself. Surely you are not going to refuse to do this for me?' he said.

He smiled again as De Rossi went off with the letter. If the Contessa did not like it—well? He thought of her pleasantly, holding, as he did, the easy Italian creed that, if money is the root of all evil, women are at least its flower. Still, if the Contessa did not like it, if by any chance she cared to make herself disagreeable—she *could* get into a rage; that was certain

—well? He adjusted his sword belt a little and strolled back to his friends, whistling softly in an undertone.

'Been giving that young fellow a rating, eh, Gasparo? He looked at you at one moment as if he would not be sorry to measure the length of his knife against your ribs,' remarked one of the men who had been waiting for him.

'I was only giving him a commission. He's my foster-brother, by the way, that chap, and would go through fire and water to serve me. So much for your powers of discrimination, my Nello,' said Gasparo carelessly.

He linked his arm in that of his friend, and they lounged slowly away together through the crowded street.

Dino meanwhile was walking down the

empty parade, on the farther side of that straggling, weather-beaten row of trees which stands between the Passeggiata and the low sea-wall. It was the same ground which he had trodden the night before in his despair, and now he was being sent over it again to carry a note at Gasparo's bidding. It was as if Fate had determined to ridicule each turn of his fortunes. He was tasting that experience which is common to all people who get into the way of considering their lives from the outside,—dramatically, as it were—the experience of those who, having many gifts, yet lack simplicity. He contemplated and criticised any mental crisis in which he found himself involved until it lost all sense of reality and became a *situation.* He was, if possible, too clever, too sensitive. He frittered

his attention away on the by-play of life. As he walked along in the sunshine of that morning, beside the blue and placid sea, it was still very much of an open question with Dino what real *rôle* he was to enact in life; it would depend so much upon whom he met; upon association and circumstance; perhaps chiefly upon some secret pressure of influence; the gift or the curse of some unconscious soul.

He walked slowly, but it was not far to the entrance of the Stabilimento. Two men were lounging in the gateway. One of them looked hard at Dino, at his preoccupied face, and the careless workman's dress.

'Here! Give me your letter and I'll take it in for you, *giovane mio*,' he said good-naturedly.

Dino threw back his head with an involuntary expression of annoyance.

'I carry my own messages,' he answered shortly.

'A thousand pardons! Evidently the Signor—the Signor Carpenter, shall I say? or the Signor *Facchino*?—evidently he wishes to pay for his entrance, then? For let me tell you that Pancaldi's is like the gate of Paradise; you don't go in without a proper *lasciapassare*.'

'Nay, can't you let the fellow alone, Beppi? Can't you see that he is carrying a message? Let him in, you idiot, else we shall have the Padrone himself down upon us,' the other man added in a voice like an intermittent growl. He moved back a step or two, making room for Dino to pass. 'Come in, come in, *bel giovane*. You need

never mind my comrade here; you cannot quarrel with a dog for barking at his own gate. *Via,*' he said, with a wave of his hand, 'put up your purse, my lad. Save the money to buy your sweetheart a fairing. Nay, if you won't believe me, you can read, I suppose? and there it is written up on the board in front of you, *Children and servants, admittance free.* And so put up your money, I tell you.'

'And pray who the devil told you that I was a servant?' demanded Dino, thrusting his hand into his pocket and drawing out a crumpled bit of paper. It was the last five-franc note he had in the world; he tossed it contemptuously across the wooden ledge in front of him. 'Pay yourself, and try to know a gentleman the next time you see one, will you?'

'Ah, a fine gentleman, truly,' said the man called Beppi, picking up the note and contemplating it with a sneer.

'*Perdio,*' added his companion, 'a man with money is a man in the right. So put that in your pipe, *amico mio*, and smoke it. Ay, money, it's like one's other blood; a man with empty pockets, 'tis but a dead man walking.'

'Oh, that's all very fine, but *I* like consistency. A gentleman's a gentleman, *I* say. It never was so much of a world to boast of at the best, and when it comes to a new tax upon the wine, and not so much as the prospect of half a day's holiday just to make a feast for the blessed Madonna of Monte Nero,—and common workmen who go about throwing five-franc notes in your face, as if the world had gone mad. *I* like

consistency, that's what I say,' retorted Beppi, in a voice which grew gradually lower as he looked from the note between his finger and thumb at Dino's receding figure.

It was scarcely more than a moment before De Rossi had come upon the object of his search. He recognised her immediately; indeed he had often before seen her passing in her carriage, a beautiful impassive figure, wrapped in her costly Russian furs. She was alone now, leaning over the balustrade with her eyes fixed vaguely upon the changing ripples of the sea. At any other moment Dino might have felt a certain timidity in approaching her; but the irritation of that challenge at the gate was still strong upon him. This woman here was only another of those

aristocrats whose privileged existences made life intolerable. Was it intolerable by conviction of its injustice, or only by force of contrast?

But he troubled himself with no such inquiry as he went up to her. He lifted his hat: 'Pardon my disturbing you; but I bring a message—a letter—from the Signor Marchese Gasparo Balbi,' he said.

She was a tall young woman, nearly as tall as himself; that was the first thing he noticed. He saw her gloved hand start and shut more closely over the railing of the balcony at the first sound of his voice. But that was the only sign of surprise which she gave. There was not a quiver of perceptible emotion on the pale inscrutable face which she turned so slowly towards him.

'*Bene.* You may give me the letter. Thanks.'

She held out her gauntleted hand with a gesture of superb indifference, and then, as her dark glance rested for the first time upon Dino, she raised her perfect eyebrows with a slight expression of wonder. She had expected to see Gasparo's soldier servant. She turned her face away from him.

'Madame Helwige!'

A little old woman dressed in black, who had been quietly seated in a sunny corner, reading a Tauchnitz novel under the shade of a large parasol, rose quickly and came forward at this call.

'The Signora Contessa desires——'

'My purse. Yes. I want some money,' the young woman said impatiently.

She made no secret of the letter she had received, holding it by one corner, and tapping the top railing with it to the measure of an inaudible tune.

'Then, if I can do nothing more for you, I will go. I have the honour of wishing you good morning,' added Dino quietly, turning away.

'Stop a moment. This lady will give you something for your trouble. Or—stop! Who are you? What is your name?'

'Bernardino de Rossi.'

'Ah. The Marchese Gasparo's foster-brother. That explains. I have heard him mention you: he says you are one of the discontented people,—a radical, a red republican, *que sais je, moi?* Is it true?' she asked calmly, fixing her large

disdainful eyes upon the young man's face.

He bowed gravely. 'Since the Signora Contessa does me the honour to inquire. I am a radical; that is my belief.'

'Really? And you think we are all equal? We are all equally discontented, 'tis true enough; *mais après?*' She struck the balustrade lightly with her letter. 'Do you see the water beating against that wall of rock, Signor de' Rossi? Twice a day the tide comes in, and before the waves can climb half-way up the cliff, twice a day the tide goes out. 'Tis the same way with the people's anger—ebb and flow. And the greatest storm can only wet the rocks; it can't uproot them. What do you Italians know about such things? But I, I am a Russian, and I know.' She looked out to

sea again. 'When the waves beat too fiercely against the shore the rock breaks them,' she said.

Then she looked at Dino tranquilly. 'I have heard the Marchese Gasparo speak of you; he takes an interest in you. It would be a pity if you should disappoint him,' she added, and moved away slowly with a careless bend of her head.

Dino stood as she had left him for a long moment, holding his hat in his hand, the wind just ruffling the thick hair on his forehead, gazing fixedly out to sea. He stood like a man under the influence of some spell. Then, as he looked up and caught the curious glance of the Countess' companion fixed full upon him, he hastily replaced his hat and turned away.

Just outside the gate he came upon

Valdez with a roll of music in his hand, going about his work. Dino nodded to him; he would not stop to speak. The older man slackened his pace, looking at him rather sadly, as if he were sorry for something, then passed on. Afterwards it struck Dino that they had never happened to pass one another in this silent way before. He stopped, looking down the long street at the old familiar figure. But what had they to say to each other now, even if he should turn and overtake him? Dino was like a man under sentence of death; all the minor obligations of life seemed annulled and suspended; where they clung still it was by force of habit, like the withering tendrils of a vine cut down at the root.

A great impatience of trouble had fallen

upon him: he wanted no more emotion, no more effort. There was a clear fortnight, perhaps three weeks, before—before he would be sent to Rome. Well! he wanted that time to himself, and he intended to have it, he intended to be happy. The first great shock of the surprise was over: his nature had already re-adjusted itself to these new conditions with the supple strength of youth. And in this fixed interval of quiet—this interval, which seemed all the longer by very reason of its being fixed,—all the light, joy-loving instincts of his age were alert within him, making music in his heart, like the rapturous song of birds between two storms. The habit of life, its careless young incredulity of the end, had never been more strong upon him; he had never felt more

irresponsible; had never looked, perhaps had never been more like his father, than on that morning, as he turned down from the broad sunny Passeggiata towards old Drea's house on the quay.

CHAPTER VII.

ITALIA.

SEEN by daylight, the entrance to Drea's house was not unlike the entrance of a cave. The house itself was in a corner of the canal, flush with the water, below the level of the street, and consisted of two rooms —the long, large entrance room where the table had been laid for the birthday supper, and another much smaller chamber beyond, which belonged to Italia, and was lighted by a very small round window like the port-hole of a ship, which looked out upon the water on the other side of the bridge. The whole place indeed had been origin-

ally designed for a Government boat-house and store-house, and was sunk in the thickness of the massive stone pier.

On a sunny morning like this, when the door was thrown wide open, any painter passing that way would have been charmed by the mysterious look of the interior, the dark-raftered ceiling, the smoke-embrowned fireplace, above which a row of bright brass plates made round spots of light in the darkness, and then the heavy coils of rope and the spare oars, arranged with all a sailor's habit of neatness, against the white-washed wall. At dusk, and when the fire was burning, it was like looking at an interior of Rembrandt's to watch the play of light and shadow over the rich ruddy brown tones of the room; but on this particular morning the fire had been allowed

to sink to a mere handful of red embers, and the room was full of the fresh smell of the sea air and the brightness of the March sunshine.

At the foot of the stone steps leading down from the street before Drea's door there was a narrow strip of stone pavement, and a floating wooden stage where the boat was moored. In the corner there, where the angle of the great granite buttress made a sheltered spot, was Italia's favourite seat. By sitting well back in the shadow one was entirely out of sight, unless indeed some especially adventurous spirit bethought himself to take the trouble to lean bodily over the parapet of the bridge overhead. But it was too busy a part of Leghorn for much idling: all day long the tramp, tramp of hurrying feet, and the hol-

low rumbling of the weighted carts rolling towards the lading ships, made a dull, continuous bass, which effectually covered any sound of voices. Italia could sing there by the hour over her work, sure of never being heard, save perhaps by some taciturn weather-beaten fisherman poling his flat-bottomed boat into the quieter water of the canal. It was Drea's own landing-stage, and he was jealous of his rights to it, giving but few boats the privilege of mooring there for an hour. Since the building of the railway, now that the canal has ceased to be of use for the heavier traffic between Leghorn and Pisa, a quieter spot than this could scarcely be imagined. For even the supposititious idler would scarcely be tempted to look this way when, just across the bridge, by leaning over the opposite balus-

trade, one could look down upon all the hurry and interest of the Old Port, and watch the slow heaving of the anchors, the puffing excitement of the blackened vessels getting up steam, or the continual come-and-go of the little boats among the shipping.

The noise and the hurry passed like an unheeded stream around Italia's sheltered corner. Dino had compared her once to an enchanted princess, and her quaint rooms, with the silent, sunny platform in front of them, to a strip of enchanted ground set apart from the disturbing commonplaces of life. The remembrance of the old fancy brought a smile upon his lips as he ran lightly down the steps that morning. Drea was not there, and the old boat was not at her mooring, but Italia was sit-

ting just where he had expected to find her. She held a book in her hand, but she was not reading, she was looking dreamily at the lazy lapping of the water against the old wooden stage. She wore the same blue cotton dress as on the previous night, but she had taken off her beads and clasp, and tied a scarlet handkerchief about her neck. Her hat was lying on the ground beside her; Dino picked it up, and his first greeting was one of playful reproof.

'Bareheaded in this March sunshine, my Italia? *Pazzarella!* Your father was right indeed when he said it required two of us to look after you.'

'Dino *mio!*'

She looked up at him with a wide, dreamy glance, which suddenly grew bright and loving. The hot colour rushed to her

cheeks, and she put up her little brown hands as if to hide them, while she laughed and shook her head.

'*Marzo pazzo*, ah, yes, I know it. But indeed, Dino, this is much more likely to drive me to distraction.' She opened the book on her lap, and turned over half a dozen pages. 'I have really tried to learn it, really. But it is so difficult; you have no idea how difficult it is, Dino.'

'Poor little thing! It is a shame to give it such hard lessons,' said Dino in a caressing tone, looking down at the rough brown hair. He threw himself down on the pavement in the shadow at her feet, and put up his hand for the book.

'Here! let me have a look at it, and see if I can't do something to make it easier for you. What is it? Arithmetic?

Oh! but this is what I gave you to do long ago. No wonder you find it difficult; you have had time to forget all my explanations. Let me see now; have you a pencil?'

'Yes; but you can't write with it. I've broken the point.'

'Give it here, then, you helpless baby!'

He took a knife out of his pocket, and picking up the pencil began to sharpen it while she sat watching him, her dark eyes full and bright with such an expression of unquestioning content as one is not accustomed to expect on faces which have outgrown their first childish calm. The water of the canal was as blue that morning as the stainless sky which it reflected, and it seemed almost as still; only now and then the faintest ripple breaking against the step

with a weak splash and stir which made the sunbeams sparkle under the wooden platform. Beyond the dark archway of the bridge the white-sailed boats came and went; her glance followed their movement with a vague sense of happy peace. She was realising for the first time the ideal of all loving-natured women: she was feeling her happiness depend upon the will of the man she trusted. When Dino looked up at her inquiringly she started, as if indeed awakened from a dream.

'Have you understood? Is that plain enough? Oh, Italia! Italia! for shame! Is that the way to treat a learned professor? You have not been looking at the book after all,' he said laughing, but shaking his head with mock severity.

The colour rushed back to her cheeks. 'Oh! I am so sorry, Dino; I forgot.'

'Now, if I were your father I should tell you that one does not carry flowers to the mill when what one wants is bread; and the quickest way to become an arithmetician is not to sit watching for the boat. By the way, speaking of the boat, Sor Drea must have gone out early this morning.'

'Yes; he went at daybreak; he woke me up to tell me he was going. He took Maso with him to help with the nets.'

'Ah! I wish I had known,' said Dino quickly.

'Father thought of going for you; then he said you would be tired—you had a hard day yesterday. And Sora Catarina would not know yet of your arrangement; she would have been frightened if you had

been fetched away suddenly in the middle of the night.'

She glanced quickly at him, and added, 'I am glad they did not go for you; you look so tired this morning, Dino, as if you had not slept.'

'I did not sleep—much,' he said absently.

He threw his arm up and laid his head against it. His face was almost on a level now with the blue ripple of the water. There was a handful of loose straw floating about among the piles: he watched it come and go as the current sucked in under the landing-stage. What was the good of thinking—of remembering? Why had Italia alluded to last night? Was he never to forget it for five minutes?

He sat up abruptly, brushing the hair

out of his eyes; but as he moved she spoke.

'Won't you give me the book now, Dino?' She bent her head down over it: 'I did not mean to vex you; I did not mean to tease you when you are so tired.'

She looked so like a child submitting to some half-understood reproof that Dino could scarcely restrain the impulse of mingled tenderness and adoration which made him long to take her in his arms and kiss her. But he forced himself to answer lightly: 'What nonsense, little one; as if anything you did could vex me!' He looked about him: 'I suppose I ought to be going now. There is no telling when Sor Drea will be in if he has taken the nets; but I wish you would sing to me—just one song before I go.' He took the

book away from her and closed it gently. 'After all, you are right; it is better to have music than to do one's lesson on such a morning. Sums are made for different weather, are they not, Italia *mia?* For days when the *libeccio* blows, and one does not mind wasting a whole morning over one terrible bit of multiplication.'

'Oh, but even I am not quite so bad as that,' said Italia quickly. 'I had only just brought out my book when you came; before then I had been talking to the signor Padrone.'

'What!' said Dino, in quite an altered voice. He noticed the change himself, but he could not prevent it; it was all he could do to ask the question quietly, 'Has—has the Marchese Gasparo been here?'

'Surely,' said Italia, looking at him with

some surprise; 'he came here about an hour ago to speak about the boat to my father. He wants to take a party of his friends out for a sail.' She added: 'I thought you knew he had been here; he told me he had met you.'

'No, I did not know it,' said Dino, speaking between his teeth.

All the radiant sweetness of the day seemed blotted out before him. It was very well for that child there innocently to accept this fiction about the boat; but did not he, Dino, understand Gasparo better? A dozen stories of the handsome Captain's powers of fascination flashed back across him. He thought of the woman to whom he had carried the letter that very morning. The letter! It was a trick to get him out of the way; that was why Gasparo

had turned that friendly smiling face upon him, and talked of 'old times,' of 'days when they were boys together,' and all the while he was planning this visit to Italia—damn him!

He forgot all about Italia's presence. With a sudden prophetic feeling he seemed looking straight ahead into the future. He could see exactly what would happen, such an old, old story; and to think that such misery could even come near Italia, his little playfellow, his little girl. If he had only known in time; if he had warned that strange lady when he spoke to her this morning, that would indeed have been fighting Gasparo with his own weapons! And then he remembered the tone of her voice when she spoke to him; to him, a man, not a girl, thrown upon her mercy.

'When the waves beat too fiercely against the shore the rock breaks them,' she said. And he was to go away, he had sworn it, and it was in such hands that he was to leave the future of Italia!

He had been silent so long that she thought him very tired. Perhaps he was depressed, too, about this sudden change in his fortunes. His mother might have been finding fault with him; Italia was always a little afraid of the Sora Catarina, who was associated in her mind with dark reproving looks and a generally grave and joyless view of life. It was always a matter of secret wonder to her when she heard her father allude to the days when Dino's mother had been a young and handsome girl. In her heart Italia could never imagine her looking otherwise than imperious

and miserable. It seemed quite probable now that she should be the cause of Dino's look of unhappiness.

'I think you would be pleased to hear one thing,' she said gently. 'Signor Gasparo was talking to me this morning about my father. You know the old Marchese always used to say that he should leave my father something in his will because of the service he did that night when the steamer was wrecked. You know, Dino; when we were children. And Signor Gasparo says that since his father forgot to put it into his will in writing, it makes no difference at all. He is going to speak to the lawyers and to the Signora Marchesa about it, and my father will have the money just the same. It is a great deal of money, three hundred francs,

in gold. Father can buy a new boat with it —dear father! Are you not glad, Dino?' She was silent for a moment, and then, for the first time, a shadow came across her face. 'I thought you would be so glad. That was half the pleasure of it,—the telling you,' she said rather wistfully.

'I *am* glad,' Dino answered, in a harsh mechanical voice.

And then the blank look of disappointment on the sweet face bending over him struck him like a pang. He sat up, rubbing both hands over his head, and ruffling up his thick curly hair. 'My Italia, you must know without my telling you if I am glad to hear of any good fortune coming to you or to Drea. But you must be patient with me this morning, *carina*. I have things to vex me; and I am very weary.'

'Poor Dino! It is my fault for tiring you. But I will sing to you now. That will rest you better than anything else,' she said soothingly, gazing down at him with frank loving eyes.

Dino smiled faintly. This sudden re-awakening of thought was like the clutch of a physical pain. 'Sing to me with your guitar. That is more formal. It is more like making a stranger of me,' he said, answering her look. As she moved away he shut his eyes, and buried his face again on his folded arm. The last hope was gone. After this what would be the use of warning Drea? The simple loyal-hearted old man was as incapable of tempering his gratitude for a gift, with a criticism of the giver's motives as the veriest child. His little store of

wisdom held no formula for such a case. It would be next to impossible to make him believe in any form of treachery connected with the handsome open-handed young master; and, even if it were possible, Dino foresaw only too clearly what would be the first—the immediate result. For had he not pledged himself to care for and protect Italia? And what more natural than that her father should turn to him in this emergency?

He lay so quiet that Italia believed him to be half asleep. She looked down at him two or three times as she sat there tuning her guitar; but as he did not move she did not speak to him. Presently she began to sing.

She sang song after song; odds and ends of old ballads; love-catches such as

the peasants sing to themselves while the sheep are grazing; full rythmical snatches of modern Greek she had learned from wandering sailors. She sang softly, *a mezza voce*, with an exquisite liquid tenderness in her voice, like the lowest notes of a brooding bird.

Once, as there came a sound of dripping oars, she broke off suddenly. A boat passed very near them, and she nodded with a smile to the stout man in the faded uniform who was seated in the bows.

'What is it?' asked Dino, without lifting his head—he too had heard the sharp click of the rowlocks.

'Dino! are you awake? And I thought you were sleeping so sweetly. Did that boat wake you then? It was nothing; only the custom-house men rowing old Captain Piero home to get his dinner.

See! there he is still waving his hand to me. I see him every day; he always passes at this hour.'

'But he does not always see you singing a visitor asleep,' said Dino, sitting up rather hastily and looking after the departed boat. 'No, I was not dreaming, my Italia; unless it be a dream to feel one's whole heart and soul full of you.' The words slipped out unintentionally; an instant later he would have given anything to recall them. He felt sure she had taken in their full meaning by the very silence which fell upon her. She sat absolutely motionless; he was sure of it, but he would not trust himself to look at her. He only added, in a tone which he tried to make quite impersonal, 'I am afraid your Captain Piero will only have a poor

opinion of my politeness. Do you think we could explain to him that I was not quite so insensible as I seemed?'

'I don't know,' said Italia, rising and laying down the guitar. She moved away a few steps and stood leaning against the gray buttress, her scarlet neck handkerchief making a vivid spot of colour there like a flower.

'I can see—I think I can see my father's boat,' she said, bending forward and taking hold of the edge of the bridge's arch.

'Take care!'

Dino got up and went and stood beside her.

'Don't lean too far forward, dear. Is that Drea's boat? What eyes you have, my Italia! See, the wind is against her; she will have to come in on another tack.'

The patched sail bent and dipped as he spoke. The boat seemed gliding away from them.

He looked down at her. They were standing so close together now he could see the quick rise and fall of her breath; the stirring of the wind in her roughened hair; the quivering shadow where the long lashes rested on her cheek.

One hand hung loosely by her side. He barely touched it, with fingers that trembled.

'Italia!'

What were resolutions or remembrance? All the world had faded away; there were no living presences now but himself and this girl beside him, and that far-off winged boat moving slowly towards them across the shining water. 'My Italia?' She turned a radiant face towards him. The

momentary shyness which had made her leave her place was gone now; there was only left a deep look of rapture in the dark loving eyes.

'Yes, Dino. You *do* love me. I know it,' she said simply. She did not change her expectant attitude; but she moved her hand until the little brown fingers clasped his.

They stood so for fully a minute without speaking, their eyes fixed on the approaching boat. 'And you love me too, Italia? You will say that you love me?' Dino said in a half whisper. He had not meant to say this. He had resolved not to say it; but what was the good of prudence now? The patched sail was drawing nearer; there was only this one moment left in which fearfully to snatch at perfect joy. He held his breath lest she should delay to speak.

But Italia answered him with grave simplicity. There was not the shadow of a doubt in her heart, not a cloud upon her heaven of content. Perhaps they had never been farther apart, these two, in all their sensations, than at this first moment of supreme understanding.

'I do love you,' she said, in her clear full voice. And then at the sound of her own words she started; Dino felt the movement of her fingers in his; her eyes filled with happy tears, and the colour swept in a quick wave over her pale face and throat. 'I think I have always loved you—after my father—always, since I was a little girl, my Dino,' she said softly.

'Only—after your father, Italia?'

She hesitated; but he had asked his question an instant too late, for now the

wind had really caught the flapping sail of the *Bella Maria;* they could see the quick movement of old Drea's hand on the tiller, and hear his voice calling out an order to Maso. In another moment the two men had brought the old brown boat cleverly alongside. Dino made a quick catch at the rope that was flung to him; there was a momentary struggle of strong-armed Maso with the heavy sail.

'Well, lad,' said Drea, standing up at his place by the helm and looking about him. 'Well, my little girl!'

'Was it a good morning's work, father?'

'*Mah!* . . . I've seen worse days, child, I've seen worse days. Mind what you are about with those nets, you Maso! That's right, lad; give him a hand. We wanted another man with us, but I've seen worse

hauls for all that. You'll be ready to go out with us to-night, eh, Dino?'

'Yes, Sor Drea.'

'Ay, ay. You'd have come with us this morning fast enough, I'm thinking, but the girl there wouldn't hear of my sending for you. "He has had a hard day; he will be so tired, father," she said. Tired! *Santissima Vergine!* and she a sailor's daughter!' The old man chuckled, straightening his back and rubbing his stiffened shoulder joints. 'But, bless you, they're all alike, and even one's own daughter is a woman. Women! they'll pray all day for rain, and be frightened the first minute they see a cloud in the sky.—You'll get your dinner here, Maso.'

Maso, a broad-backed young fellow in a blue jacket, looked up from the wet heap

of nets with a smile which showed all his white teeth. 'Ay, Sor Drea.'

'And I must be off home,' said Dino, looking at Italia.

'Ay, lad. You'll stay another time likely. There won't be too much dinner to-day for three of us,' the fisherman said simply, 'and Maso has earned his share. The chestnut is for the man who takes its shell off: that's my way o' thinking.'

'I could not stop in any case; thanking you kindly all the same, Sor Drea. I told my mother I'd be back to dinner. By the way, I was to ask you if it is all settled about our going up there?' he nodded in the direction of Monte Nero.

'Ay, ay. 'Tis settled for Sunday fast enough. Sora Catarina has only to get herself ready. We might have had worse

luck, Maso; we might have had worse luck. 'Twas stiffish work with only two of us,' old Drea said, sitting down on the edge of the platform with his feet in the boat to light his pipe. '*Mah!* . . . *che volete?* There's nothing like the day after a storm for finding out the colour o' the bottom o' things. There's good in every wind that blows, lad, for a man who knows how to set his sail.'

He thrust a heap of the wet shining fish aside with his foot.

'When there's not so many o' the big there's more o' the little. You know what I'm always telling you. The Devil himself, *con rispetto parlando*, the Devil himself has a curly tail.'

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